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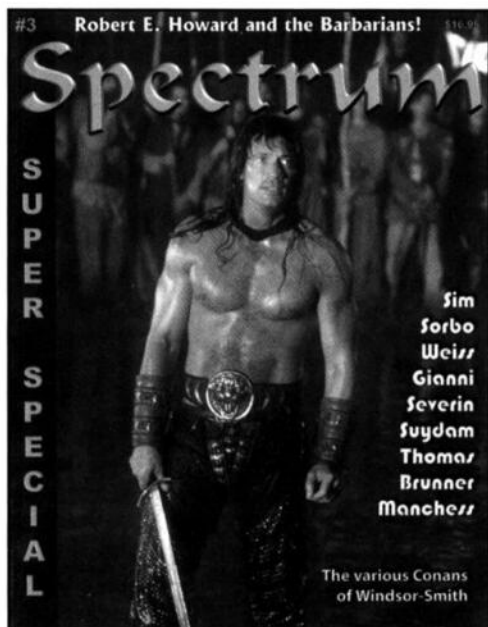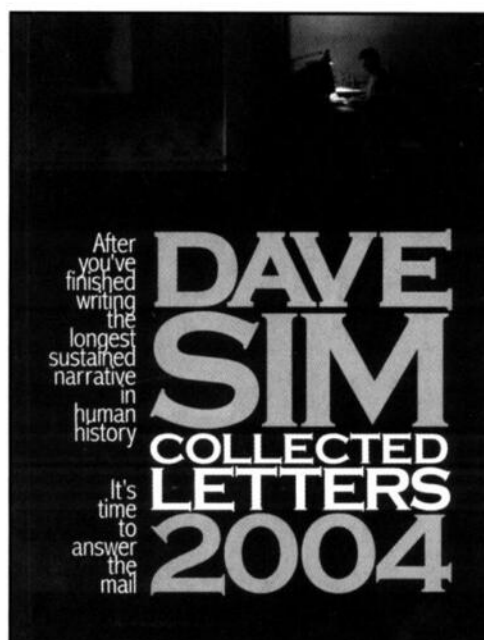
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Following Cerebus

Vol. 1 #6 November 2005

***Following Cerebus* produced by**
Craig Miller
&
John Thorne

***Cerebus* comic book by**
Dave Sim
&
Gerhard

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The Many Origins of Cerebus

I. The Comics World of 1977

Cerebus 1 slipped quietly into comic book shops in December 1977.

It was, however, a very different world from today for fans, retailers, distributors, and publishers. Consider, for example:

While Marvel and DC dominated comics sales, they were pretty much by themselves, except for a few Gold Key titles that were mostly humor and, hence, ignored by collectors. The current explosion of publishers was still years away. (It's not unlike the television world, in which the three major networks plus PBS used to dominate the landscape. The eighties and nineties would bring many more channels.)

Nobody had heard of Todd McFarlane, Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, or Jim Lee. *Warrior* magazine in Britain would not introduce "V For Vendetta" or the refurbished Marvelman (a.k.a. Miracleman) for another four-and-a-half years.

The X-Men not only weren't the sales powerhouse of today, but, having been brought back from years as a reprint series only recently, they starred in merely a single title, and it was published just bimonthly. Wolverine was attracting interest but would not get his own book for another five years, and even that was just a mini-series. He would not get his own monthly title for another eleven years (1988).

John Byrne had just started drawing *The X-Men* a couple months before, but fans weren't sure whether the artist of "Rog 2000" and *Marvel Team-Up* was up to the task. Frank Miller's first *Daredevil* would not come out for another year and a half. Jim Starlin would not kill off Captain Marvel for another five years in the first *Marvel Graphic Novel.*

George Pérez's *New Teen Titans* was still three years away, and in fact DC was is such bad shape that only die-hard fans of the company paid much attention to them at all—for many collectors, the publisher was just barely one notch above Gold Key except for the Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers Batman stories in *Detective*, Mike Grell's new *Warlord* (the artist/writer having attracted some attention for his Legion of Super-Heroes work in *Superboy*), or perhaps the occassionally interesting *Brave and the Bold* by Bob Haney and Jim Aparo. Dick Grayson was still Robin (Jason Todd wouldn't appear for another six years). *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, DC's attempt to simplify the complicated and messy forty-five-year history of the "DC Universe," was still eight years away. DC's most talked-about project of 1977, "Superman Vs. Muhammed Ali" (which was published as the treasury-sized *All-New Collectors' Edition* 56), was so long-delayed by artist Neal Adams that Ali would lose the heavyweight championship title (to Leon Spinks) just a couple of months after the edition's release, causing more ridicule toward the publisher.

Mike Baron and Steve Rude's first *Nexus* would not appear for almost four years. The Hernandez Bros.' *Love and Rockets* was five years away. Likewise Dave Stevens's "Rocketeer." Will Eisner's groundbreaking graphic novel *A Contract With God* was still a year away.

We could go on and on, but every decade brings its own new blood. The reason the industry was quite different in the seventies was more foundational than which characters were popular, or who was writing and drawing which book. No, the primary change involved the way comics were distributed. And central to the change in distribution was the growing emergence of the comic specialty stores, creating probably the most crucial impact on the industry in its history, and—for the subject at hand—a change that allowed for a three-hundred-issue self-published comic book to endure.

Getting Comics to the Comic Shops

In 1977, there were only a handful of comic book shops around the country, and those few tended to be concentrated in New York and Cali-

Facing page: a comic store rack as it might have looked in December 1977/January 1978 as Cerebus *1 hit the stands. Note that Marvel and DC comics dominate the selection. John Byrne draws three books:* Marvel Team-Up, Powerman, *and* The X-Men. *Jim Shooter, Roger McKenzie, and Gil Kane have started to re-invigorate* Daredevil*; soon Frank Miller arrive on the scene.* Star Wars *is a hot new Marvel comic (the movie is parodied in the current* Howard the Duck*). At DC, Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers are creating excitement in* Detective Comics*, as is Steve Gerber and Michael Golden in* Mister Miracle. *The black-and-whites feature a John Buscema/Tony DeZuñiga* Savage Sword of Conan. *The Warren mags feature Esteban Maroto, John Severin, Berni Wrightson, Bruce Jones, Rich Corben, Alex Niño, Gonzalo Mayo. Russ Heath, Paul Neary, Jose Gonzalez, and Ramon Torrents.*

In the late sixties and early seventies, countercultural "underground" comics bypassed the mainstream distribution and found their way into head shops. Pictured here are comics by Jeff Jones (1973), Dan O'Neill (who later lost a court battle with Disney over his Air Pirates parodies)(1971), and Rich Corben (1971).

fornia. Regular newsstand distribution—drug stores, grocery stores, and the like—was still the primary outlet for comic fans to buy their magazines. The so-called "Independent Distributors" (or "I.D.s") handled the majority of comics—and that's a generous description. Because of comics' low cover price relative to "real" magazines, they received the lowest priority. Stories abound of issues never even being sent to stores. Since unsold copies could be returned for credit (actually, only the top third of the cover was returned; the rest of the issue was thrown away—or at least was *supposed* to be thrown away), the I.D.s didn't lose money if the comics never made it to the stores.

In 1973, Phil Seuling's Sea Gate Distribution began buying comics from the publishers on a non-returnable basis, but at a higher discount than the I.D.s were getting. Thus began the "direct market" distribution of comics. Sea Gate distributed the non-returnable comics to comic shops, and, at long last, a more reliable system of distribution was in place. Later, Seuling's exclusive distribution was challenged in court by New Media/Irjax, opening up the way for a multitude of comics distributors. For a while, numerous distributors handled new comics; now Diamond delivers the majority of new comics to shops.

Buddy Saunders: "You really can't say that there were any comic book stores before about '73."

Sea Gate's distribution innovation made comic shops viable. Buddy Saunders, owner of Lone Star Comics and mycomicshop.com, says, "You really can't say that there were any comic book stores before about '73, when Seuling started distributing comics, because before that, everybody was a used book store that carried comics, pretty much. [Bud Plant's] Comics & Comix may have been one of the super-rare exceptions. Because you just couldn't get enough comics used."

Plant and partner John Barrett opened Comics & Comix in 1972—one of the few such shops in the country. Plant says, "We had already gone through a couple [of stores], because we had started our first one in '68. There was one in San Francisco and a couple in Los Angeles. There were a handful, but not many. One in San Jose. Bob Sidebottom was down there." Plant had the advantage of having a strong customer base for underground comics, which were never distributed through the normal I.D.s. "Head shops were the traditional places to put the undergrounds," says Plant. "My regular mail order business that I started in 1970 was selling underground comics, and then any other comics-related stuff that was out there. Primarily I was selling underground comics. Comics & Comix, also because they were in San Francisco, had a really strong underground base—and also because the first store was on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, the hip capital of the world."

Before Sea Gate, dealers had to scramble as best they could to stock new comics. Saunders says, "In the early days, I would go over to [independent distributor] Martin News Agency in Dallas. They had a guy there who stripped covers off for return credit, and he would have piles and piles of comics that were to be returned. And so before he stripped them, I could go through the stack, and if I thought something was going to be a hot issue, I'd find return copies that were still in decent shape. I'd go ahead and pay full price for them so that they wouldn't strip the covers." Saunders continued going to Martin for a short time even after starting to order from Sea Gate. "Whatever condition your

books [from Sea Gate] got there, that's how you got them. If they looked liked they were torn in half, too bad. No returns, no replacements. What you got was what you got. Seuling had a monopoly, and he acted like he had a monopoly. And all he took were initial orders. There was nobody you could reorder from. So the local [I.D.] distributor returns functioned as my reorder system. Of course, there were no comics being published that weren't newsstand then, so you could find pretty much anything."

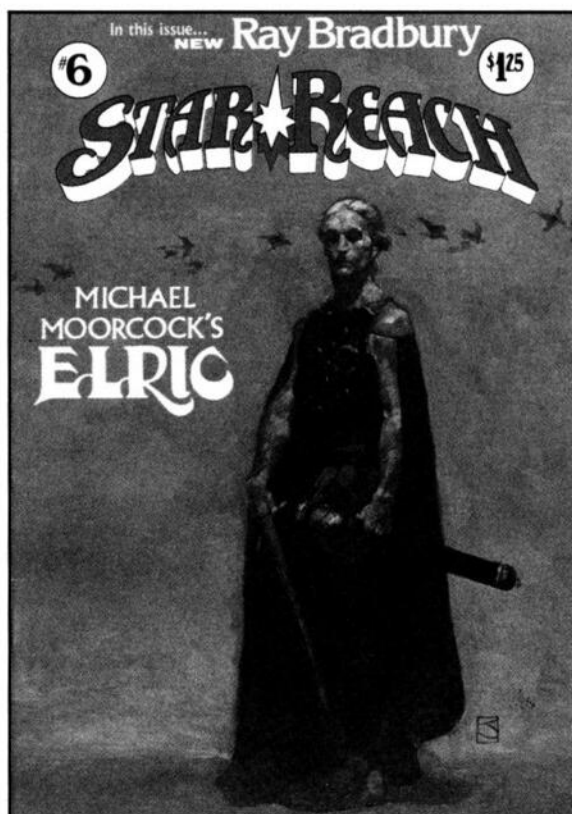
Despite the frustrations retailers sometimes had to endure, Sea Gate introduced an important step in a distribution system that would ultimately make *Cerebus* (and numerous other independently-published titles) possible. "Phil Seuling was the exemplar of that movement," says Plant. "He was an older person but still figured out, 'I've got a better idea. Why don't we do it this way instead of the traditional way,' and other people started coming along and riding on his coattails. The whole industry changed, because then you had fans who knew the product opening shops and starting distributorships and getting the material out there and supporting the better stuff. Seuling started the whole thing. He had the exclusive for a while, but he finally got sued by one outfit, and that broke his hold on being the exclusive distributor, and that opened it up to other distributors, which was actually better for the market in the long run."

Such were the changes in the distribution part of the industry when *Cerebus* arrived on the scene, and they are critical to understanding the book's impact on the industry, and the industry's impact on Dave Sim's ability to distribute his work to the widest possible comic book readership. Before Sea Gate's arrival, self-published magazines and comics—mostly the fanzine variety[1]—were produced, but they were made available mainly through other fanzines (primarily the *Buyer's Guide for Comics Fandom*—now called the *Comics Buyer's Guide*—and the *Rocket's Blast Comicollector*, usually just referred to as *RBCC*) or mail order companies. At that time, the dominant mail order source for small-press magazines was Bud Plant, who supplied both retail customers and comic shops with a wide assortment of otherwise obscure comic book merchandise. (His mail order business continues to this day.) When Sea Gate agreed to distribute *Cerebus*, it allowed the book to get timely national releases; working through the I.D. market would have been impossible for Sim.

Mike Friedrich: "*[Star*Reach]* was the right idea at the right time."

*Star*Reach* Blazes a New Trail

Because of the arrival of Sea Gate and comics specialty stores, publishers could theoretically bypass the traditional drug store and newsstand distribution and market product directly to comics fans, but who would take the first step? That turned out not to be Sim, but Mike Friedrich, a Marvel writer who, in 1974, began publishing *Star*Reach* using some of Marvel's artists. The appeal for them was

[1]The most enduring of which was *Star-Studded Comics* produced by the Texas Trio—Buddy Saunders, Larry Herndon, and Howard Keltner, which began in 1963 and ran twenty-three issues into the 70s.

Star*Reach *attracted some top talent, including Howard Chaykin and Jeff Jones, as seen above.*

Cover art by Neal Adams and Barry Windsor-Smith

that Friedrich would allow the creators to own their work, unlike the work-for-hire contracts that were standard with the major publishers.

The seventies were a time when creators were beginning to demand more control over their work. They could see what was happening to some of the founding fathers of the medium. Jack Kirby, co-creator of most of Marvel's major characters, left to work for DC with no claim on any of the millions that would continue to be generated from his work. Even more heartbreaking, Joe Shuster, co-creator of Superman (with Jerry Siegel), was living in poverty with failing eyesight while Warner Bros. was gearing up for the first in a series of Superman

Bud Plant: "There were very few black-and-white comics [in the mid-70s]. Either you were an underground, or you were a Marvel or DC.**"**

feature films. Neal Adams led a well-publicized fight to get Shuster financial aid—essentially shaming Warner Bros. into providing a yearly stipend—but young artists could see the writing on the wall.

*Star*Reach* would never have been accepted by Marvel or DC (Marvel's *Epic Illustrated*, and later their creator-owned Epic line, would not begin until 1980), so Friedrich needed a way to get his comics to stores. But the intial challenge was in financing the operation. High-minded artistic rights arguments were all well and good, but the top Marvel artists were accustomed to the company's page rates to pay the creators' living expenses.

Friedrich explains, "The hardest part for me was getting the art, because what I was trying to do was provide an outlet for Marvel artists to do their own thing, but I couldn't afford to pay Marvel rates. And so it just took a long time to build up enough money to even come close to where one story in each book would be by somebody you'd heard of. And it wound up over time that it was more people who were not known at Marvel yet were coming to get their work published by me."

Once he was able to build up an inventory, however, the rest was not a problem. "On the business side, it wound up falling into place very quickly and very easily. I was set up with Bud Plant, Last Gasp, and Phil Seuling right away, and within a year or so, all of the smaller regional distributors had discovered me. I didn't find them. I was very lucky by being the first one out there with this kind of thing, that people were looking for it. It had the benefit of being successful right away."

Not surprisingly, Friedrich credits the arrival of comic stores as essential to the feasibility of *Star*Reach*. "That was it. It was because I knew about those stores here in the Bay area—I was aware of Bud's store, I was aware of Bob Sidebottom's store in San Jose. It was actually Bob who taught me what I needed to know about those kinds of shops and what they were interested in, and it was very directly an inspiration to create material for those stores. I had no idea at the time how many of them there were, and it turned out they were opening all the time. So I was catching a wave that was unknown to me, but again I was very fortunate. It was the right idea at the right time."

Because of the freedom given to the writers and artists (including Jim Starlin, Walt Simonson, Howard Chaykin, Neal Adams, Dick Giordano, Frank Brunner, Jeff Jones, Barry Windsor-Smith, Alex Nino, Craig Russell, and others), many issues contained more adult material than could appear in the Comics Code-approved Marvel and DC comics. But the comics didn't push things as far as the countercultural underground comics of Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, Vaughn Bode, S. Clay Wilson, Spain Rodriguez, Victor Moscoso, and others. How then should *Star*Reach* come to be designated?

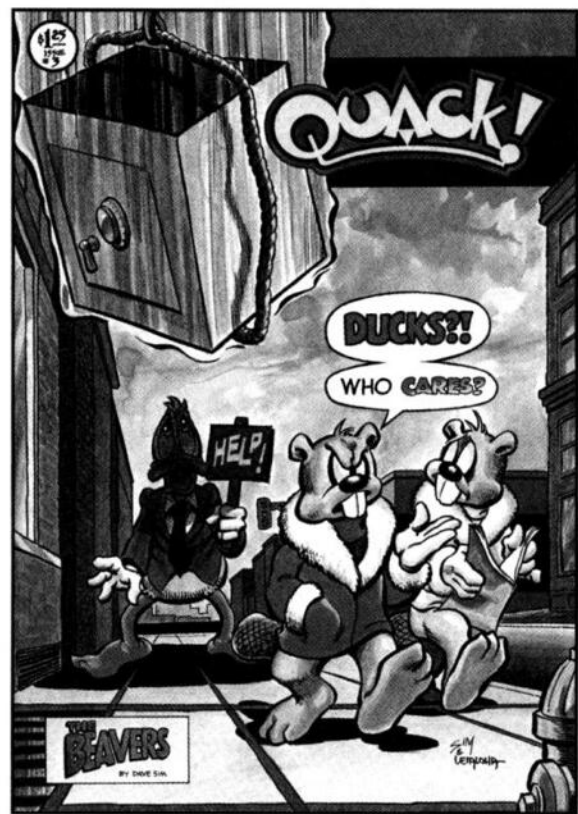
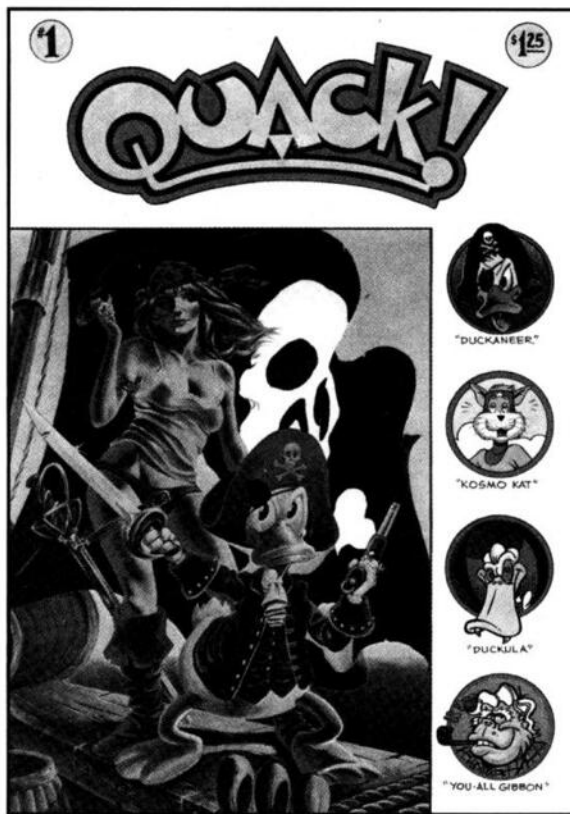
Friedrich is credited with coining the term "groundlevel" to describe his publications (which later included the funny-animal title *Quack* and the *Star*Reach*-like *Imagine)*, but Friedrich revealed that he didn't invent the term: "Somebody else had actually come up with that term as a derisive joke, and I fell in love with it. I said, 'Oh, that's a perfect term,' and I started using it."

Eventually *Cerebus* would be included in the "groundlevel" category, but it was never a large group, especially early on. As Plant says, "There were very few black-and-white comics at that point. Either you were an underground, or you were a regular Marvel or DC thing. It was a teeny-weeny market." Where did most stores place *Star*Reach?* It featured Marvel artists but was in black-and-white with more adult content. Friedrich says, "It was like, where did they put *Savage Sword of Conan?* You know? That's where they tended to rack *Star*Reach*, because there was kind of a connection there. It was a distant one, but it was close enough. I would say most people put them with the underground comics, because there was more adult material in it, but there were also people that racked them near *Savage Sword.* It was very rare if they got racked with the Marvels and the DCs. That didn't really start happening until the eighties. First Comics and Elipse came along, and there then was a whole body of stuff that looked like a Marvel and walked like a Marvel, so they started racking them like a Marvel. The seventies was always a tough time for retailers to figure out what to do with a lot of this stuff."

Actually, *Star*Reach* did have a little company in 1974—provided by Bud Plant himself (or, more specifically, Comics & Comix). He began publishing *The First Kingdom*, a black-and-white magazine written and drawn by Jack Katz. The storyline spanned twenty-four issues, with a new issue coming out every six months until its completion in 1986. It was a huge commitment for an audience in which even bi-monthly and quarterly frequency sometimes tested their endurance. But for the most part the readers stuck with it. Plant says, "Initially sales were very good, because it started out during a good period for undergrounds. But by about issue 11 or 12, sales started dropping, because that was six years later, in the late seventies. I used to reprint the early issues, but then I was dropping the print runs on the later issues. So I think by the time I got to 24, I

Top: Jack Katz's First Kingdom. *Bottom: T. Bird's* Barbarian Killer Funnies. *Both published in 1974.*

don't know if I was even doing ten thousand any more. I might have been doing eight. The first issue went to twenty thousand. That was typical. The average underground, you'd usually do about twenty thousand. So yeah, it was diminishing returns [on *First Kingdom]*. We tried doing a synopsis. We had a guy who was doing one in each issue to try to bring people up to date, but you had to be into it to keep track of what was going on. It was a complex story in the first place, and there was no wrap-up in every issue, so it was asking a lot of readers. I'm not really surprised, in retrospect, that the audience fell off."

Amazingly, *First Kingdom* was Katz's only project during all those years: "He was devoting all of his time to that. He's a really meticulous artist. He's pretty fast on pencils, and that's what Stan Lee used to use him for in the fifties on his books. But you get him into inking, and he just overinks. He has to fill every blank space with stuff, and that would

Quack *covers by Frank Brunner and Sim/Steve Leialoha*

just take him forever. We paid him a hundred bucks a week, and his wife was basically making the rest of the money to live on. And he did that for ten years—all he did was *The First Kingdom.* He's still around; I'm in touch with him. He's teaching art students down in Berkeley. I think he's working on a graphic novel for Mecca, a 150-page story that's going to be coming out soon. Some guys never stop!" *[Laughter]* (As a matter of fact, Mecca Comics is in the process of reprinting *The First Kingdom* in a four-volume set.)

Plant—either alone or as part of Comics & Comix—also published *Barbarian Killer Funnies* (a straightforward underground parodying Conan and such), *Anomaly,* and *Spaced Out* (by Jim Pinkowski, who went on to do evangelical religious comics), but *The First Kingdom* was the one that most easily fit the "groundlevel" category and was generally racked alongside *Star*Reach* and, later, *Cerebus.*

But in December 1977, when *Cerebus* arrived, he still had little company, as even the first Elfquest story would not appear in *Fantasy Quarterly* for another few months and would not get its own title until August 1978. Only *Star*Reach* and *Quack,* two quarterly anthologies, would offer any type of guidance for retailers. And ironically, *Quack's* final issue, #6, would come out in December 1977. *Star*Reach* itself would soon move to a magazine format.

As one final note, we should point out that Sim contributed to Friedrich's publications before beginning *Cerebus* and in fact actually pitched *Cerebus* to Friedrich. (See Sim's article "The Many Origins of *Cerebus*" beginning on page 18.) Friedrich turned it down—around the same time he turned down *Elfquest.* He now says, "I was working with Dave Sim before *Cerebus.* He did some writing for me on a couple of jobs, and I knew him from when he was a fanzine editor before all of that. He had actually interviewed me at a convention, and I met him at a Toronto convention, and two or three of my favorite stories for *Star*Reach* were things that Dave was involved in. I especially remember the story in issue 7. It's still one of my all-time favorites. I just love that one." But Friedrich still passed on *Cerebus:*

December 1977

Marvel

- ☐ THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #178
- ☐ THE AVENGERS #169
- ☐ BLACK PANTHER #8
- ☐ CAPTAIN AMERICA #219
- ☐ CAPTAIN MARVEL #55
- ☐ CONAN THE BARBARIAN #84
- ☐ CRAZY #35
- ☐ DAREDEVIL #151
- ☐ THE DEFENDERS #57
- ☐ DYNOMUTT #3
- ☐ FANTASTIC FOUR #192
- ☐ GODZILLA #8
- ☐ HOWARD THE DUCK #22
- ☐ THE HUMAN FLY #7
- ☐ THE INCREDIBLE HULK #221
- ☐ THE INVADERS #26
- ☐ IRON MAN #108
- ☐ JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS #10
- ☐ LAFF-A-LYMPICS #1
- ☐ THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS #2
- ☐ MARVEL'S GREATEST COMICS #76
- ☐ MARVEL SUPER-ACTION #6
- ☐ MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #70
- ☐ MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #2 [Conan]
- ☐ MARVEL TALES #89
- ☐ MARVEL TEAM-UP #67
- ☐ MARVEL TREASURY EDITION #16 [Flintstones]
- ☐ MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION #40
- ☐ MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #37
- ☐ MASTER OF KUNG FU #62
- ☐ MS. MARVEL #15
- ☐ NOVA #18
- ☐ PIZZAZZ #3
- ☐ RAWHIDE KID #144
- ☐ RED SONJA #8
- ☐ SGT. FURY #145
- ☐ THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #16
- ☐ SPIDEY SUPER STORIES #32
- ☐ STAR WARS #9
- ☐
- ☐ TARZAN, LORD OF THE JUNGLE #10
- ☐ THOR #269
- ☐ TOMB OF DRACULA #63
- ☐ YOGI BEAR #3

Warren

- ☐ CREEPY #95
- ☐ EERIE #90
- ☐ FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND #141
- ☐ VAMPIRELLA #67

National Lampoon

- ☐ HEAVY METAL #10
- ☐ NATIONAL LAMPOON #94

DC

- ☐ ACTION COMICS #481
- ☐ ADVENTURE COMICS #456
- ☐ ALL-NEW COLLECTORS' EDITION C-55 [Legion]
- ☐ ALL-NEW COLLECTORS' EDITION C-56 [S Vs. Ali
- ☐ ALL STAR COMICS #71
- ☐ BATMAN #297
- ☐ BLACK LIGHTNING #7
- ☐ THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #140
- ☐ DETECTIVE COMICS #476
- ☐ DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE #2
- ☐ FIRESTORM, THE NUCLEAR MAN #1
- ☐ THE FLASH #259
- ☐ FREEDOM FIGHTERS #13
- ☐ GHOSTS #62
- ☐ GREEN LANTERN #102
- ☐ HOUSE OF MYSTERY #257
- ☐ JONAH HEX #10
- ☐ JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #152
- ☐ KARATE KID #13
- ☐ MEN OF WAR #5
- ☐ OUR FIGHTING FORCES #178
- ☐ SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS #13
- ☐ SGT. ROCK #314
- ☐ SHAZAM! #34
- ☐ SHOWCASE #98 [Power Girl]
- ☐ STEEL, THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN #1
- ☐ SUPERBOY & THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES #237
- ☐ SUPERMAN #321
- ☐ THE SUPERMAN FAMILY #188
- ☐ SUPER-TEAM FAMILY #15
- ☐ THE UNEXPECTED #184
- ☐ UNKNOWN SOLDIER #213
- ☐ WEIRD WAR TALES #61
- ☐ WEIRD WESTERN TALES #45
- ☐ WELCOME BACK, KOTTER #10
- ☐ THE WITCHING HOUR #78
- ☐ WONDER WOMAN #241
- ☐ WONDER WOMAN SPECTACULAR [DC SS #9]

Gold Key

- ☐ THE BEAGLE BOYS #40
- ☐ BORIS KARLOFF TALES OF MYSTERY #80
- ☐ BUGS BUNNY #193
- ☐ BULLWINKLE #19
- ☐ DAFFY DUCK #113
- ☐ DONALD DUCK #192
- ☐ FAT ALBERT AND THE COSBY KIDS #23
- ☐ HUEY, DEWEY AND LOUIE #48
- ☐ THE INSPECTOR #19
- ☐ LITTLE MONSTERS #44
- ☐ LOONEY TUNES #18
- ☐ MICKEY MOUSE #180
- ☐ MOBY DUCK #30
- ☐ RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT! #76
- ☐ SUPER GOOF #45
- ☐ TOM AND JERRY #303
- ☐ TWEETY AND SYLVESTER #78
- ☐ UNCLE SCROOGE #149
- ☐ UNDERDOG #17
- ☐ WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES #449
- ☐ WOODY WOODPECKER #163
- ☐ YOSEMITE SAM AND BUGS BUNNY #50

The Comic Reader's *checklist for December 1977*

"Dave was working for *Quack* and offered *Cerebus* to me, and I told him I didn't think there was a market for it, which shows how intelligent I really am. I had the distinction of telling both Dave and Wendy Pini, 'Listen, if you really want to do this, do it yourself,' and gave them some ideas on how to do it, and both of them went ahead and did it. It worked for both of them."

Cerebus Faces the Competition

With Phil Seuling having set up a distribution system that allowed publications to get to comic shops easily, and Bud Plant and Mike Friedrich having shown that the market was ready for independently-produced work that was different from the standard Marvel and DC product, Sim had a couple things that he could look to in order to see that self-publishing was at least theoretically possible. *Cerebus*, however, would differ from the other titles in that Sim was determined to maintain a regular bi-monthly schedule (that would soon increase to monthly). There was no guarantee that distributors would carry the comic, or that retailers would order it. Sim could look to *Star*Reach* and *The First Kingdom* for some sort of guidance if he wanted, but that guidance would be limited.

One thing worked in his favor, and we passed over it too quickly a second ago: "the market was ready for work that was different from the standard Marvel and DC product." The comic book market of the late seventies has a reputation—completely deserved—as one of the worst periods for good comics. Part of this perception may have resulted from the explosion of talent in the late sixties and early seventies. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's reinvigoration of the superhero genre was followed by Jim

Sim's Star*Reach *7 story*

Quack *1 contains this obscure pre-Rocketeer art by Dave Stevens!*

Steranko's synthesis of Kirby and "pop art" in some incredible *SHIELD* and *Captain America* comics; Neal Adams's import of commercial illustration realism into *The X-Men* and *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* and, later, his rescue of *Batman* (along with writer Denny O'Neil) from the television-influenced campiness; Kirby's development of the "Fourth World" series for DC; Barry Windsor-Smith's synthesis of Kirby, Steranko, art nouveau, and the Pre-Raphaelites into, of all things, a new *barbarian* comic, *Conan;* Berni Wrightson and Len Wein's exquisite *Swamp Thing;* and Michael Kaluta's 1930s-ish *The Shadow*. As these creators left the comics industry one by one, there were very few quality artists to fill the gap.

In addition, the comics industry was getting a reputation as something an artist graduated out of

Friedrich: "I told [Sim] I didn't think there was a market for [*Cerebus*].**"**

once he reached a certain proficiency. Return of original artwork to the artists (fought for early on by Adams and Windsor-Smith) and character ownership by their creators (as noted above) were but two of the controversies frustrating the top artists. Finally, the printing quality was dropping, to the point that by the end of the seventies, it was not unusual to see many of the finer lines of the artwork break up entirely in the reproduction. (Supposedly, the move from metal plates to plastic plates

on the printing process partly accounted for the poor quality.)

The mid-seventies brought a few high quality (and, nowadays, often overlooked) series: Marv Wolfman and Gene Colan's *Tomb of Dracula;* Steve Gerber and Mike Ploog's *Man-Thing;* Steve Gerber and Gene Colan's *Howard the Duck;* and Doug Moench, Paul Gulacy, and (later) Gene Day's *Master of Kung Fu.* These, however, were islands in a sea of waste.

RBCC*: the place to find obscure zines. Cover art by Berni Wrightson.*

Marvel dominated the industry, more from the momentum of its earlier years than anything else. They deluged the market with a slew of minor books such as *Godzilla, Human Fly, Invaders, The Man From Atlantis, Ms. Marvel, Nova, Laff-a-Lympics*, and numerous reprint titles, and their main titles had dropped in quality and were mostly forgettable except for Chris Claremont and John Byrne's moderately entertaining *Marvel Team-Up* and Jim Shooter and Gil Kane's *Daredevil.* Fans almost completely ignored DC (except for Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers's stunning *Detective Comics*, as noted above), and looking back on its titles of the day, it's easy to see why: *Karate Kid, Firestorm, Black Lightning, Freedom Fighters, All-Star Comics, Steel, Ghosts, Weird War Tales, Weird Western Tales*—the list goes on and on. In the late eighties, we heard a prominent DC editor—it *may* have been Dick Giordano, but we can't remember for sure—state that Marvel was ripe for being overtaken in the late seventies. Roy Thomas had resigned as Editor in Chief, and everything was chaos. The problem was, stated this DC editor, DC was not ready to regain the dominance it enjoyed in the early sixties, and they squandered an opportunity they would not have again for another decade.

Of course, Marvel did bring back the X-Men in 1975, but it was not the industry giant it would later become. In fact, it would not really begin to get noticed until John Byrne hit his stride a few years later.

Fans were ready for something unusual—as the few quality books mentioned above prove—but for the stores that ordered *Cerebus*, how were they to display this odd duck (so to speak)? This was a time when most stores had things fairly segregated, before the trend of throwing everything into a single A-to-Z display to force fans to look at comics they might not otherwise notice. (A hardcore Marvel Zombie wouldn't even pick up a DC, let alone wander over and take a look at one of the independents!) Plant notes, "Comics & Comix did it a couple of different ways. One of the ways was simply to alphabetize everything, which was an interesting and healthy way—that way you could get *Cerebus* next to *Captain America*, or whatever. It put it right up there in front. I don't know exactly what we were doing when the very first *Cerebus* came out, but we went through evolutions. It would vary over time. Usually the underground comics tended to be racked separately, because they were for adults, so we wanted to segregate those. *Cerebus* would have been with the regular comics, not with the undergrounds."

At Lone Star Comics, "Basically you had Marvels and DCs and all the odds and ends. There were magazines coming out—*Starlog* or something like that. So anything that wasn't Marvel or DC just got lumped in at the end of the rack," says Saunders.

This was essentially the formate used by Chuck Rozanski, president of Mile High Comics: "We racked by genre, so we always put Marvels and

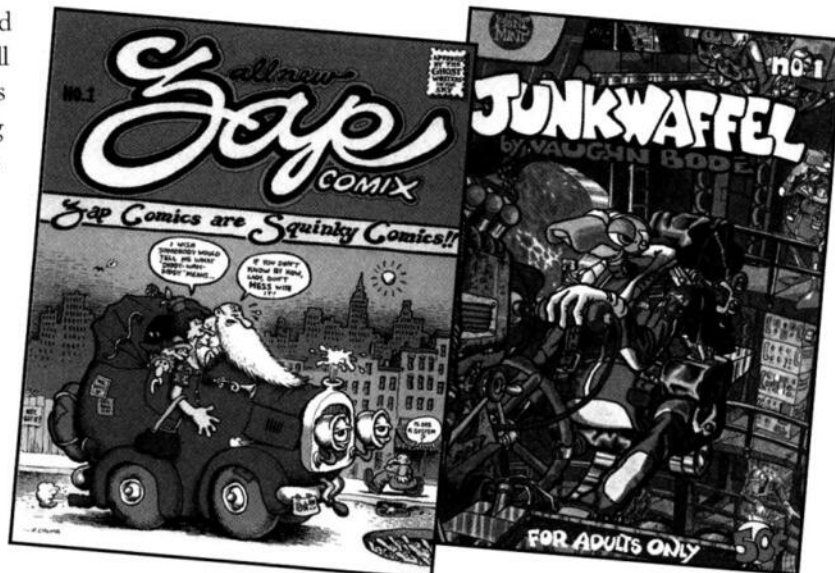
Bottom: Plant's ubiquitous Cerebus *ad from a 1981* Savage Sword of Conan. *Top: Plant's current catalog is 200+ pages of great stuff. Check out www.budplant.com.*

DCs together, then we had that broad catch-all category for everything else small press and more unusual. Pacific Comics came along later on and started doing color books. In our stores we tended to push the more unusual, small press eclectic area more than we pushed the Marvel and the DC, because those sold themselves. We were contantly trying to convert people, in a sense subverting the establishment, trying to get as many new readers for the alternative press as we possibly could. We had no idea at the time, of course, that it would eventually explode the way it did. But we defintely were using Marvels and DCs to draw people into the store, and then we were trying to 'corrupt' them. *[Laughter]* The more copies of *Zap* I could sell on a given day, the better I felt."

Undergrounds by Robert Crumb (1967) and Vaughn Bode (1971).

But Rozanski didn't stumble across the aardvark until 1978. He says, "I didn't discover *Cerebus* until about issue 4. It was one of the other retailers in Denver who was ordering them through Bud [Plant] who brought them into town first. He didn't know what to do with them. He just kind of stuck them on his rack. We were all bringing in things from Phil Seuling and from Bud. Phil always brought in an ecclectic mix of different products, so our racks in those days were not just Marvel/DC types of comics. We had a lot of things like Warren magazines. There were all sorts of things. Phil brought in a lot of British material, things like *2000 A.D.*, that we were also racking. It wasn't just standard comics. So there was a place for *Cerebus*, and for that matter *Fantasy Quarterly* 1, which was the first Elfquest. That also fell into that range. And there were some guys in Michigan who turned out about four or five superhero comics—*Power Comics*—that were black-and-white on the inside. They were an interesting experiment for the time.

"Anyway, I walked into my competitor's store—we got along well—and he had *Cerebus* up on his shelf. I bought issues 1-4 from him, took them home, read them, and was so impressed that I went back, and I bought him out [of his remaining copies]—*retail.* I took them back, and in those days the market was primarily a back issue market, and I think I priced the number 1 at ten dollars, 2-4 at five bucks each. Lo and behold they sold almost immediately. I thought, 'Hey, I'm onto something!' I started buying them through Bud, and eventually I had an extra set that I had kept of 1-4 or 1-5, and I sold that extra set fairly early—I think 1988—for $1000. That was a really hefty price for those."

Like Plant, Rozanski's interest in undergrounds ("We didn't call it Mile High Comics because it was in Denver!") gave him an affinity for an off-the-wall independent such as *Cerebus.* He says, "In the early days, and actually to this day, my primary interest has always been underground comics. So *Cerebus* was, in effect, an underground comic that was mainstream enough to the extent that it didn't have the sex and violence that you normally associate with undergrounds, and yet at the same time it had a really wry political perspective combined with the integration of a semi-superhero mythos into a funny animal character. Let's see, I'm crazy about Carl Barks, I'm crazy about underground comics—especially political ones—and I really liked when Barry [Windsor-]Smith and Roy Thomas were doing the *Conan* issues (and for that matter Alfredo Alcala). But you had in *Cerebus* this incredible hybrid that crossed all three of those genres that I was crazy about into a single entity. It immediately connected with me.

"I was fortunately enough to purchase six of the original pages out of those first ten issues—several of which I still have—and those were available at a dreadful little show in Houston. I bought them at the show—that would have been in 1980—and they were a whopping $35 a piece. Since then I've been offered about a hundred times that much for those really seminal pages. I still have them.

"We really pushed *Cerebus.* We pushed it very hard. Dave Sim came out in 1982 and signed autographs for us at four of our stores and provided a little sketch for me that we used as the cover for one of our early Mile High catalogs. So I was into the whole *Cerebus* thing pretty early—way before most comics retailers were involved in it."

Chuck Rozanski: "[T]his entire industry has benefited greatly from the perspectives that Dave has brought to the table."

Fortunately for Sim both Plant and Seuling carried *Cerebus*, allowing the comic easy access into the comic shops. Plant says, "In the early days of *Cerebus*, I think Phil Seuling and I were taking the

T. CASEY BRENNAN

Dave Sim: "Bill Johnson—in addition to being Harry Kremer's business partner in Now & Then Books—was also a professional photographer, which is why you have this one good photo [above] of Casey to go along with my bad ones." At right: a recent photo of Brennan. Far right: poster for Brennan's band Frankenhead.

entire print run.[2] There was hardly anybody else anyway. I don't remember the numbers now—we might have been taking 3000 or 4000 copies of each issue, and I remember at one point my garage was filling up with back issues of *Cerebus [laughter]*. I had a warehouse, but I was storing this stuff in the garage. We really had a strong belief in the series doing well, and back then you could sell back issues very well, so it all worked out. It took a while to move some of those back issues—I had lots of them in the teens and twenties. And then things broke open, and *Cerebus* started getting distributed by the other distributors, too."

Part of Plant's push to sell back issues included ads in *Savage Sword of Conan*. "That was a relatively cheap place to advertise and actually reach a big audience instead of doing something in the *Rocket's Blast* that was preaching to the converted. Chuch Rozanski was a pioneer in that, too, because he was putting full-page ads in Marvel Comics, which had a big circulation."

Eventually, more and more fans discovered *Cerebus*, just as more and more publishers entered the scene. First, Pacific, Eclipse, and Capital challenged Marvel and DC with full-color productions, while by the early-to-mid eighties an entire sub-genre of black-and-white independents had entered and (by 1987) flooded the market, creating a backlash. Yet the first few—Matt Wagner's *Grendel* (1983) and Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1984), for instance—could easily be considered as following in the trail blazed by the success of *Cerebus*.

Rozanski notes, "It's been a wonderful run, and I think this entire industry has benefited greatly from the perspectives that Dave has brought to the table. There's no doubt about that at all."

Sim's story for Imagine *4*

[2]Actually, as Sim notes in his article this issue, Big Rapids Distribution was also carrying the comic from the beginning, as was Now & Then Books. Seuling ordered 1000, and Big Rapids and Now & Then took 500 each.

II. T. Casey Brennan: the Alan Moore of the '70s?

Longtime Cerebus fans—or even new fans who have read Dave Sim's essay in this issue—know that Cerebus *1 was not Dave's first aardvark story. That would be "A Boy and His Aardvark," a bizarre little tale that appeared in* Power Comics *1.*

The story was written by T. Casey Brennan, a name not heard much these days in comics circles, but who was all the rage in the early seventies with a series of wondrous, fable-like allegories appearing, in all places, in Eerie *and* Creepy*, Jim Warren's black-and-white magazines that emphasized low-key horror (or, probably more accurately, suspense) tales with surprise endings, much like the classic EC comics of the fifties. In these and in* Vampirella*, Brennan's stories were distinctive and memorable.*

He was an immediate hit—with just his third published story, the extraordinary "On the Wings of a Bird" in Creepy *36 (November 1970), he won Warren's in-house award, the Ray Bradbury Cup, for "Best Script" for the year. (The story also received a nomination from the ACBA—the Academy of Comic Book Arts—the only Warren story ever to be so honoresd for best short story.) At least two early Warren covers (*Creepy *42—featuring a sequel to the issue 36 story—and* Eerie *38) prominently mention Brennan on their covers, almost unheard of at the time for writers (and even artists). You might say that Brennan was the Alan Moore of his day.*

Brennan's stay in comics was, unfortunately, brief. Some personal crises diverted his attention, and while a few stories trailed out in the late seventies, the bulk of his comic book career was over (though recent Vampirella *reprints by Harris Comics have reintroduced his stories to a new generation).*

In the nineties, he re-emerged with a couple of John F. Kennedy-related stories that can be found online. In fact, type "T. Casey Brennen" into a search engine, and you will find that he is all over the net. Brennan himself alerted us to a few of these sites:

Celebrity Homeless List with my name, plus JFK pages about me: *http://www.angelfire.com/stars4/lists/homeless.html*

This is a comic book-oriented fan page: *http://www.darkelfdesigns.homestead.com/mkultra02.html*

This is my band's page: *http://www.norecordlabel.com/newbandpage.php?b_id=3479*

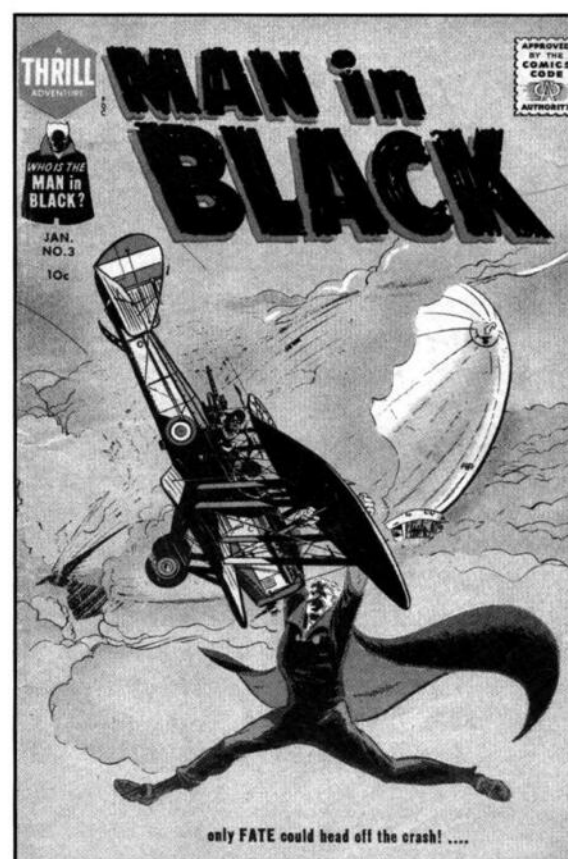
This is my column at Popimage:
http://www.popimage.com/industrial/conjurella092204.html
This is a Canadian JFK page:
http://www.angelfire.com/me/carcano
This is from The Konformist magazine; scroll down to get my photo and caption, "sexiest JFK MK-ULTRA assassin alive":
http://www.konformist.com/mkkafe/tcasey/tcasey.htm
This is from a professor at the University of Rhode Island:
http://karws.gso.uri.edu/JFK/Conspiracy_theories/Brennan—Conjurella/Brennan.html
Satanic Reds T. Casey Brennan fan page with satire of Hare Krishnas:
http://www.geocities.com/tcb_sr
Anathema Research's original T. Casey Brennan archive reposted with new material by the Mind Control Forums:
http://www.mindcontrolforums.com/tc/tcasey.html
This is the new TCB fan page, with Clinton document:
http://pw1.netcom.com/~mthorn/0brennan.htm

Brennan preferred to conduct this interview via e-mail. Craig Miller sent the questions on October 27, and the next day the answers arrived. Our thanks to Casey for agreeing to talk about these thirty-five-year-old stories.

Miller: *Before working with Dave Sim on "A Boy and His Aardvark," you wrote a series of acclaimed stories for Warren magazines—*Creepy, Eerie, *and* Vampirella. *Most featured characters trapped in hopelessness, despair, and existential dread (very reminiscent of Sartre's* Nausea*). You were writing these stories while in your early twenties. What inspired these fascinatingly bleak tales?*

Brennan/Sim story from Fantasy Quarterly *1 (best known as the first appearance of* Elfquest*).*

Brennan: That's one of the best questions I've ever had to handle on my comic book work. I'll give you a simple answer, though the phrase "multi-factorial causation" comes to mind. I was always in love, usually with ten or twelve girls at once. I had, and still have, a Mormon's capacity to do that. Love

Impact *1 (cover art by Jack Davis)*

Man in Black *3 (cover art by Bob Powell)*

breeds pain, love breeds anguish, love breeds despair. More people kill themselves over love, I'd say, than over anything else. I had girlfriends all through my twenties, all through my thirties. Then, when I turned forty, it was like someone switching off a light. Suddenly, they were all gone, and for ten long years, I was lonely. When I turned fifty, I started attracting girlfriends again, from the Ann Arbor campus and punkrocker girls. I got hit by a car in 2003; I couldn't get an attorney, so my hospital bills aren't even paid. I'm a little crippled now, and a little retarded—I never recovered completely from post-concussion syndrome, no short term memory now, and can't remember names and faces very well. I really *am* homeless—sometimes I sleep in the forest. But I have more girlfriends now than I ever had before in my life. Apparently, ninety percent of my readership is now girls 18-25. Keep in mind, I'm old, ugly, half-crippled, half-retarded, and dirty. Girls roll up on me 24/7—ones I know, ones I don't know but that want to meet me. Anyone that sees it thinks it's amazing.

CM: *Your Warren stories are notable for their allegorical nature—this was, in fact, what impressed Dave most about them. Such stories are rare in comics (unless one stretches the category to include the basic aspect of good-versus-evil that constitutes most superhero adventures), though more common in science fiction (perhaps most notably Ray Bradbury). Whom would you list as your influences?*

CB: Influences in comics? I'd list EC's *Impact* #1 and Harvey Comics' *Man in Black* as well as the short lived *Black Cat Mystic*, also from Harvey. I tried to write stories in the same melancholy style as those books. I'm glad you feel I succeeded.

CM: *Now that some time has passed, do the themes in these early stories still resonate with you? Do they seem naive? Profound? How do you look back on this work?*

CB: I want to quote Jim Warren here, then explain how it's applicable. Basically, I saw Jim Warren as a gullible idiot, but he gave me one of the wisest quotes I've ever used. I've used it thousands of times, but only in conversation, never in print—till now.

I was in Jim's office, I was in my twenties, and Jim, behind his desk, says: "Time changes things."

He pauses a moment and says, "You're too young now to understand what that means, but—." He pauses again, then says it again: "Time changes things."

When I wrote for *Creepy, Eerie*, and *Vampirella*, I had no idea that someday we, all of us at that company, would be counted among the founding fathers of the "goth movement." Goths are part of the punk revolution now; they have their own dress code, their own issues, their own lifestyle. A girl told me a few years back that she went to her first Goth party and made a *faux pas* by smiling at every one. We're Goths. We're sad. Sort of.

CM: *Dave says that "A Boy and His Aardvark" was intended as part of your own title. It eventually saw print in*

Top: Dave Sim: "Casey pretending to read a copy of Creepy *36—presumably 'On the Wings of a Bird'—in the section of my parents' basement where I kept my comic books (that's the oil tank behind him)." Bottom: "Climbers of the Tower"* (Creepy *50) is a great example of Brennan's allegorical Warren work, as two men spend their lives climbing an (apparently) infinite tower. Art by Felix Mas.*

Power Comics *1 (along with "A Gift of Wonder").Was this the book that you had envisioned, or did your plans change?*

CB: What I originally intended was an underground comic, along the lines of the stuff coming out of San Francisco at that time. That's why "A Boy and his Aardvark" was so spacey; I was imitating the likes of Justin Green, Robert Crumb, *et al.* What I didn't realize, at that time, was that the seventies hippies, the campus left, all instinctively hated me. I have no idea why that was, but they *always* threw me out of the campus protest meetings. I didn't become cool by contemporary standards until they invented punks. And it grows. My hair and beard are all dreadlocked now, because the girls put in braids and they dreaded. I polled the people requesting my autograph at a Motor City Comic Con in Novi, Michigan a while back and they were one hundred percent skateboarders, except for one girl, and she didn't count, because her boyfriend, who wanted the comics, *was* a skateboarder. Twenty-first century punks hold 1970s hippies in contempt now; they're just old weirdos who drive off chicks. I've picked up phrases from them, like "the neo-fascist beat of Steely Dan." The hippies still hate me, but it has no effect. But they would have lynched me for producing my own under-

An ad for this issue appeared on the back of Fantasy Quarterly *1 but the comic itself never appeared. We think the art is by Mike Gustovich.*

T. CASEY BRENNAN CHECKLIST

Creepy
#31: "Death of a Stranger" *(art by Ernie Colon)*
#36: "On the Wings of a Bird" *(art by Jerry Grandeletti)*
#37: "The Cut-Throat Cat Blues" *(art by Ernie Colon)*
#38: "The Way Home!" *(art by Mike Royer)*
#42: "Escape From Nowhere World" *(art by Jerry Grandeletti)*
"Loathsome Lore!" *(art by Ken Kelly; 1 page)*
#43: "The Golden Sun Disk of the Incas" *(art by Rich Corben; 1 page)*
#44: "The Last Days of Hans Bruder" *(art by Frank Bolle)*
#45: "Dungeons of the Soul" *(art by Felix Mas)*
#47: "Mark of the Phoenix" *(art by Reed Crandall)*
#50: "Climbers of the Tower" *(art by Felix Mas)*
#61: "A Stranger in Eternity" *(art by Adolfo Abellan)*
#63: "A Ghost of a Chance" *(art by Vicente Alcazar)*

Creepy Yearbook
1972 (reprint)

Eerie
#22: "Family Curse" *(art by Tony Williamsune)*
#29: "Strange Gateway" *(art by Jack Sparling)*
#36: "Eerie's Monster Gallery" *(art by Pablo Marcos; 1 page)*
#38: "The Carrier of the Serpent" *(art by Jerry Grandenetti)*
"A Stranger in Hell" *(art by Esteban Maroto)*
#51 (reprint)

Fantasy Quarterly
#1: "Doorway to the Gods" *(art by Dave Sim)*

House of Mystery
#260: "Dead Wrong" *(art by Jerry Grandenetti)*
#267: "A Strange Way to Die" *(art by Abe Ocampo)*
#268: "The Man Who Spoke With Spirits" *(art by Jess Jodloman)*
#274: "The Soul of Faustus" *(art by Jerry Bingham and Tex Blaisdell)*

Nightmare
#11: "Where Gods Once Stood" *(art by Carlos Garzon)*

Orb
#5: "One Man's Madness" *(art by Gene Day)*

Power Comics
#1: "A Gift of Wonder" *(art by Vince Marchesano)*
"A Boy and His Aardvark" *(art by Dave Sim and Jim Friel)*

Red Circle Sorcery
#6: "Black Fog" *(art by Gray Morrow; 2 pages)*
#7: "The Benefactor" *(art by Vicente Alcazar)*
#10: "The Demon Rider" *(art by Jack Abel and Wally Wood)*

Vampirella
#5: "Escape Route!" *(art by Mike Royer)*
#17: "Beware, Dreamers!" *(art by Jose Gonzalez)*
#18: "Dracula Still Lives!" *(art by Jose Gonzalez)*
#19: "The Shadow of Dracula!" *(art by Jose Gonzalez)*
#20: "When Wakes the Dead" *(art by Jose Gonzalez)*
#21: "Prologue" *(art by Jose Gonzalez)*
#81, 100, 109 (reprints)

Speaking in Spanish, Billy Graham accepts the Best Art trophy for VAMPIRELLA artist Jose Gonzalez.

His trophy for Best All Around Writer firmly in hand, Archie Goodwin delivers short acceptance speech.

Con Chairman Phil Seuling (right) presented Warren with an award "for bringing vitality and challenge" to comics.

Holding the Ray Bradbury cup for Best Script—"On The Wings of a Bird"—CREEPY #36 is T. C. Brennan.

Awards announcement from Eerie *38. (Photos by Gary Groth. Whatever happened to him?)*

ground comic. Good thing it didn't happen.

CM: *How did Dave come to draw the aardvark story? He mentions that he had also drawn "Picture This" for you with less-than-satisfactory results.*

CB: We were both associated with the late Harry Kremer of Canada's Now & Then Books. He just won a Shuster Award in Toronto for his magazine, a Canadian comic book creator's award, named for Toronto-born Joe Shuster of Siegel & Shuster, the team that created Superman. Ironically, I was mentioned in the ceremony as one of three "American luminaries" that Kremer had spotlighted. I should add, to my discredit, that I had no idea then that Dave Sim's *Cerebus* would become legendary internationally. Probably, Jim Warren feels the same way now. I tried to get him to publish "A Boy and his Aardvark." He refused, most emphatically. I guess I foresaw a *little* of what was coming, re: Dave's work. Jim saw nothing at all. But, then again, "Time changes things" for all three of us. I'd love to see Dave revive Dandy the Aardvark now that Cerebus is dead or hibernating or something.

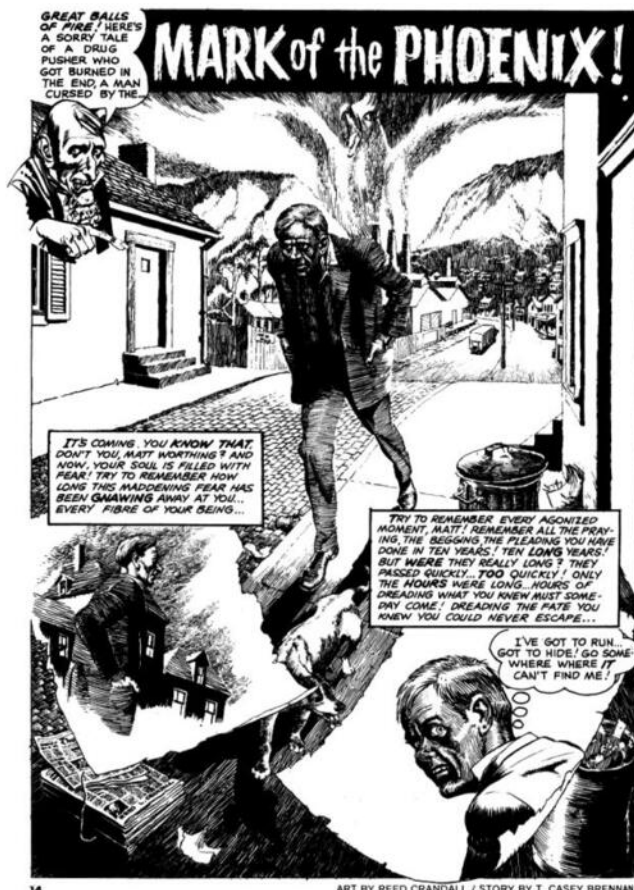
CM: *You virtually disappeared from the comic scene by the mid-seventies (except for the* Power Comics *stories). What have you been up to?*

CB: I virtually disappeared from Warren, but there were issues of DC's *House of Mystery* and Archie's *Red Circle Sorcery* that carried my work into the late seventies. Maybe some of my best work in the comic book genre. I also did some experimental Golden Age style work for Paragon, which became Americomics. They published my version of the Phantom Lady and a Phantom Lady knock-off called The Black Mistress. Then there's my JFK work from the late nineties, which has turned up in such publications as Austin's *Salt for Slugs* and *Steamshovel* press. And, I'm a singer in a punk rock band called Frankenhead; we did a show at Gallery 555 in Detroit, Michigan on April 1st, 2005, with Vietnam era revolutionaries John Sinclair and Pun Plamondon, and several other already legendary Ann Arbor punk bands—the Versificators, the Pussy Pirates, and Hullabaloo. I'm hoping you can print the poster. It was an honor to be on with John and Pun, though I told program organizer Tommy "Spaghetti" King not to introduce me to them. Honor or not, I just don't like hippies. You can listen to two of my songs, which I wrote and sang, at the band's website, www.norecordlabel.com, and do an artist search for Frankenhead. My songs are "Social Worker Blues" and "Let Them Rise." Unfortunately, you now have to register your email with the site to listen.

CM: *Have you kept up with comics much for the past thirty years?*

CB: No. I had to be completely reintroduced to the medium.

CM: *I think that does it. I hope I haven't buried you with too much, and I certainly appreciate your time. Be sure to get me an address where we can send copies of this when it comes out next month.*

CB: That's the hardest part. I'm homeless, and until someone gets me an attorney for being hit by the car, I'll remain that way. I was struck on

Reed Crandall illustrated this story from Creepy *47.*

the intersection of Washtenaw and Oakwood in Ypsilanti, Michigan, on February 1, 2003. The driver was completely at fault. I was thrown out of the hospital at 5:00 a.m., barely able to walk or speak. Members of my band Frankenhead took me in for a few weeks, then *they* threw me out. A punkrocker friend took me in at a punk house, where traveling punkrockers stay. I had to learn to walk and talk all over again. Social workers refused assistance, inexplicably, so did attorneys. I've been homeless ever since.

III. The Many Origins of Cerebus

by Dave Sim

Kensington Market/Aardvark

I don't remember what year it was, but I phoned in to CHYM Radio (1490 at that time: I would later do their ad campaign for the switch to 570) and answered a trivia question and my prize was an album. I couldn't make out over the phone what album it was that I won, so I was looking forward to finding out. Imagine my disappointment when it turned out to be an album called *Aardvark* by a band named Kensington Market. I remember being particularly irked that there was no picture of the band itself, just this fairy-tale looking cover of a stage with the curtains parting and revealing (what I figured out was) an aardvark. That was my overall reaction: irritation. I'm pretty sure I never listened to the album, but I did spend a fair length of time looking at the cover. An aardvark in the middle of a stage. "I don't get it," I thought.

I didn't know what a Kensington Market was, either, until a couple of years later when a rare example of a Canadian situation comedy debuted called "King of Kensington" starring Al Waxman. That was when I found out that Kensington Market was (and is) a largely ethnic neighbourhood in downtown Toronto, bordering Chinatown. Oddly enough, it is now part of the regular route that Chester Brown and I take walking back downtown from the Beguiling, right past the statue of Al Waxman.

"A Boy & His Aardvark"

T. Casey Brennan had come to the first annual Southern Ontario Panel Art Festival held at Now & Then Books in June of 1972. He was an early enthusiast of conventions and fan gatherings and had heard about the event from someone and had come up from Michigan on his own initiative which pretty much flummoxed all of the attendees and we, the organizers.

A professional comic-book writer. An *actual professional comic-book writer.*

I remember all of us crowded in the front room of Now & Then Books at 103 Queen Street South basically just staring at him, goggle-eyed. At one point I remember he flashed his ACBA (Academy of Comic Book Arts) laminated membership card, ironically establishing for us his bona fides as a pro and, I suspect, was much amused when the gesture basically sucked all of the oxygen out of the room. We stayed in touch with him and he returned to Kitchener in December of that year to be interviewed for the second issue of *Now & Then Times* which I edited and which was published in the summer of 1973.

His professional history had been a good example of "right place, right time" in that he had submitted a script to Warren Publishing, completely ignorant of the

"A Stranger in Hell" (Eerie 38) is far from Brennan's and artist Esteban Maroto's best work yet still better than most comics stories. Note Brennan's fascinating (as usual) dialogue that hints at depth of character: "Can you reweave the fabric of a life? Can you heal a soul?" You don't get that from most comics. Heck, you don't get that from most films.

fact that he was doing so in the immediate aftermath of long-time editor and ubiquitous scripter Archie Goodwin's departure. He produced a series of distinctly lyrical, metaphorical and allegorical stories in a very short space of time, the most famous of which was "On the Wings of a Bird" in *Creepy* No.36 which not only won the Ray Bradbury Cup that year (part of Jim Warren's in-house awards which he used to present at Phil Seuling's New York Comic Convention) for best story, but was also nominated for an ACBA Award in the same category: virtually the only time that ACBA had nominated a non-DC, non-Marvel work in any category.

It's not an enormous stretch to say that T. Casey Brennan was as influential on me as a writer as Barry Windsor-Smith had been on me as an artist and in a very comparable way: it was he who first introduced me to the idea of the allegory and its core application to storytelling. That was what made the best of his works—"On the Wings of a Bird," "Carrier of the Serpent," "Climbers of the Tower"—stand out, particularly at Warren Publishing where the EC, Twilight Zone stock twist ending still reigned supreme. The summer after interviewing him, my lessons in allegorical storytelling had begun to sink in and one night I did a parody of the splash page of "On the Wings of a Bird," changing it into "On the Back of a Pro" and substituting Casey for the *Creepy* magazine horror host, Uncle Creepy. In retrospect,

T. Casey Brennan in December of 1972 being interviewed in the back room of Now & Then Books—the original 103 Queen St. S. location—for Now & Then Times *No.2 (Summer, 1973).*

this very much represented the seminal wedding of allegory and parody which would prove to be the foundational concept behind *Cerebus*. I sent Casey a stat of the first page and asked him if he would agree to script the rest of the parody. He wrote back in a letter dated 8-30-73:

> *Why in God's name do you want* me *to write it when you can do a job as good as this? The fascinating thing is how you can completely capture a style when doing something like this…as you captured Feiffer's style in that 1-pager in the last CANAR, and as you captured mine in the enclosed.*

Even though I suspected he was just being polite, it was the first time that someone had suggested I had an aptitude for capturing the style of others and I filed it away mentally for future reference even as I completed the story: my first full-length parody which John Balge agreed to publish in CANAR. The exaggerated cartoon-like drawing style that Jerry Gandenetti (a veteran of Will Eisner's late 1940's Tudor City shop) had adopted by the late 1970s was certainly easier than a lot of styles I might've tried to imitate and the gray washes helped to hide a lot of my fundamental lack of basic drawing skills.

STORY AND ART BY DAVE SIM - WITH APOLOGIES TO T. CASEY BRENNAN AND JERRY GRANDENETTI

Dave Sim: "As mentioned in the letter on the facing page, Casey's mother had been killed and his father seriously disabled in a hit-and-run car accident in Ohio on May 19, 1973. He was the first person to indicate to me that I had an aptitude for parody. Without his encouragement in this letter, I'm pretty sure I would never have attempted finishing 'On the Back of a Pro' on my own."

Award-winning story from Creepy *36.*

As Casey said in the 1972 interview, whenever he and Jim Warren got together, either he would quit or Warren would fire him. By the time I was drawing "On the Back of a Pro," Casey was beginning to plan an entirely new career, centered on doing adult comic book stories for an adult audience in an oversized trade paperback format ("the *Dracula* format" named after Warren's 1972 experiment with a 120-page trade paperback which reprinted the Spanish Pan-European Buru-Lan/NEL *Dracula* series which featured a number of stories by Esteban Maroto and other Spanish artists). It's interesting to consider thirty some-odd years later that Casey was very much decades ahead of his time in anticipating the need for a fan-centered Direct Market and in seeing that a 120-page trade paperback represented a giant step in the right direction. Quoting him from the December, 1972 interview:

> *Jim Warren has come out with something no one in the U.S. has come out with before and that's the five-dollar* Dracula *book to be sold in book stores. This is strictly for adults because no kid is going to say, "Mom, can I have five dollars to go to the store and buy* Dracula*?" So that's a new idea in comic books—the idea of a quarterly to be sold in book stores for a high price and for adults only; not in the sense that "adults only" has come to mean in comic books and other magazines—that it's dirty. It's just good work.*

I'm not sure if I wasn't the one who first put the bug in his ear about doing his own version of Warren's *Dracula*, asking at one point in the interview "If you were deciding to organize your own company and had your choice of any four artists, whom would you choose?" To which he replied,

> *Well, it would depend a great deal on what kind of comics I was putting out—some of my favourites like Jim Steranko, like Neal Adams, like Esteban Maroto. I like Kirby on superheroes. I like Charles Schulz on* Peanuts. *I'm very impressed with Jim Steranko's imagination and his talent for understanding the comic-book storytelling method so well.*

When he *did* begin to plan his major book project he obviously realized that he would have to start many, many rungs down the ladder of professional pecking order and had sent out feelers to various amateur and fanzine artists he had met in his travels of 1971-73 asking if they were willing to draw stories "on spec"—no up-front money, but a promise of royalties—for the proposed publication.

"T. Casey Brennan was as influential on me as a writer as Barry Windsor-Smith had been on me as an artist."

I was one of those artists, which should give you a rough idea of how close to the bottom of the list he was in seeking out collaborators. I was certainly more than willing and cranked out a seven-page story called "Picture This" from the script supplied. Another script—a five-pager—followed shortly

8-30-73

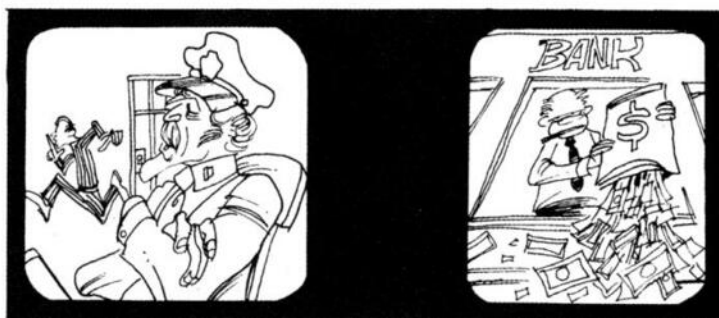
Dave...

Why in God's name do you want me to write it when you can do a job as good as this?

The fascinating thing is how you can completely capture a style when doing something like this...as you captured Feiffer's style in that 1-pager in the last CANAR, and as you captured mine in the enclosed.

I really would like to help, tho you really don't need it... but I just don't have time now. My father is still bed-ridden; I have a hospital bed set up here for him. I run the whole show, cooking, cleaning, and waiting on him 24 hours a day. I haven't done any new scripts since Mama was killed May 19th; when I get back to work, I think soon, it's going to have to be for pro-mags and for money. When I am back on my feet again, and out of debt (I owe Warren money, he sent a check special delivery without my asking for it, when I was stranded at the hospital in Marion) then I can do fanzine work.

I am most honored, however, that you chose to parody my work, thanks and my very best wishes...

T Cas B.

Dave Sim: "This was the biggest leap forward I ever made on my own as an artist. Above is a page from my first attempt from 1973 at illustrating Casey's "Picture This" script and below my second attempt from 1975."

thereafter entitled "A Boy & His Aardvark". This time I was asked to just supply the pencils. I suspect Casey had been horrified at the precipitous drop in drawing quality from "On the Back of a Pro" to "Picture This" (attributable to the fact that I wasn't virtually tracing another artist's drawings this time out).

"Again with the aardvark," I thought, mentally kicking myself that I had, in the interim, gotten rid of the album whose cover would've been useful for drawing reference. Instead I had to look up "aardvark" in the dictionary and fake the details that weren't visible (as well as trying to figure out what this strange beastie—which I had only seen in illustrative profile—might look like from different angles). It did seem like a strange "next link" in an allegorical chain provided by the person who had himself first introduced me to the concept of allegory. The aardvark that had been inexplicably posed on a stage was now—equally inexplicably—a co-star in a comic-book script, the first I had ever been asked to draw. Even though I was seventeen at that point and Casey's script called for a "*slightly* long-haired boy of about twelve or thirteen", I drew the boy pretty much as a self portrait, having a sense, however vague, that "allegory is as allegory does."

I don't think I did an appreciably better job on this one than I had on "Picture This". It would be convenient to blame the inker, Jim Friel (who, coincidentally, a few years later as the owner/proprietor of Big Rapids Distribution would become the second distributor of *Cerebus* when he agreed to take five hundred copies of the first issue), but I'm pretty sure he didn't have much to work with. Two years later I would try again on "Picture This," aiming to hit a more professional level still beyond my grasp, studiously examining Al Williamson's work and coming to understand for the first time exactly what was meant by the art cliché of "Less is more." But on "A Boy & His Aardvark" I was really just thoughtlessly and hastily slapping down pictures without really pausing to consider anything that could be described as composition or narrative.

I never heard back from Casey about the second story and in fact it would be a little over three years later when *Power Comics* No.1 would arrive in my mailbox. A far cry from the adult book that had been promised it was an unhappy mish-mosh of the strange paganisms and sorcerous subjects which had come to occupy Casey's literary attentions by that point in the usual 75 cent newsprint and colour cover format that Mike Friedrich had pioneered with *Star*Reach*. T. Casey Brennan had introduced me to the allegory and as his

own life took some hard turns he was also the first person I ever heard use the name Aleister Crowley with—as I thought even at the time—misplaced reverence.

There in the pages of *Power Comics* No.1 was the story Vince Marchesano of Hamilton, Ontario's Spectrum publications had drawn featuring an extremely fictionalized "T. Casey Brennan, Figure of Mystery" who bore not the slightest resemblance to its author and which I would later satirize in one of The Beavers strips in *Quack* as "A. White Beaver, Figure of Mystery". "A Boy & His Aardvark" was easily the worst drawn of the stories in that issue and all I really hoped was that so few people would see it, or notice my signature on the last page, that it wouldn't hurt me professionally at that late date.

The Ant and the Aardvark

It had been just my bad luck that my family got colour television for the first time in the summer of 1976 (for the Montreal Olympics being staged that year) and that I would move out on my own in December before I could really enjoy it. One of the television programs that I was watching faithfully that year was a syndicated package of Depatie-Freleng Studio cartoons—the ones who had developed the Pink Panther animation which preceded the film and its sequels and who evidently retained the license to produce a number of shorts over the course of the next few years. The Pink Panther cartoons were quantum levels below the full animation quality of the movie intro—reportedly they were paid a quarter of a million dollars to produce the cartoon movie titles—and like most of the Depatie-Freleng output it ranged from above average to atrocious (average when they had first secured a license, as they had previously with the Road Runner, and then atrocious as they just pumped out the mandatory amount of product for Saturday morning television). The Warner Brothers and Depatie Freleng syndication packages were comparable in that way. You usually saw three or four really appalling examples of the worst grade of animation for every above average one but it was the sacrifice you had to make. In the 1970s, in Southern Ontario, anyway, that was the only way the better cartoons were made available.

It was actually a relief when I had to make do with a black-and-white second hand television to watch "The Ant and the Aardvark" series. At least the Aardvark in black and white had a certain stylishness to him. In colour he was sort of this electric blue bright enough to make you wince. I always wondered whose idea that was—making the aardvark's fur and clothing—everything in fact except his eyes—all one colour. I tended to suspect the budget people in collusion with the cell-painting department.

I'm not sure if they got the famous Jewish dialect comedian, Jackie Mason, to actually do the Aardvark's voice. There's a long tradition in animation of misappropriating voices by doing imitations of famous actors and actresses. But, I remember being struck by how the whole thing just didn't work. The Aardvark didn't *look* remotely Jewish and, as far as I remember, never said anything that *sounded* remotely Jewish. So, I'd usually just sit there wondering about that. Given that the whole point of Jackie Mason's act was that he was irrefutably Jewish, why would you get him to voice a character that had no Jewish qualities to him? And—even more perversely—if you had just gotten someone to "do" Jackie Mason, why that particular voice if there was nothing remotely Jewish about the character?

Kind of funny to think about in light of the Torah commentaries in *Latter Days,* but I also used to wonder "What could possibly be Jewish about an African mammal?"

It was a little strange when *Power Comics* came in at the same time that *The Pink Panther* show had become part of my daily afternoon routine.

"What is it with this *aardvark* business?"

Cerebus and "Not Loubert" Press

While assembling the Cerebus Archive, I came across the following:

> *It all began when a slender, dark-haired wench (looking all of sixteen) walked into the downstairs of Harry Kremer's* Now and Then Books *(my only regular job ever) and said, "Hi. Are you Harry?" Once I allowed as how I didn't believe so, she (undaunted, of course) informed me that she was the publisher of a magazine yet to be published. Right. Another one of "those". This magazine was going to be like* Dark Shadows *and would Harry be interested in selling said unpublished work in his store? I told her the magazine was called* Dark Fantasy *(didn't faze her a bit) and added that I—ahem—knew the publisher personally (Hi, Gene). She fairly glowed with appreciation at the fact that this was a celebrity of rare proportions, undoubtedly working in a bookstore for the sheer joy of being like common folk (actually it was for $65 a month). Taking pity and heart respectively, I told her I would do some drawings for her first issue and proceeded to write about my name, address and phone number and told her to call sometime and come over and we would discuss it (no fool I). She recognized the 'Sim" from* "Dark Shadows" *since I wrote it the way I sign my drawings (once again, no fool I) and I felt like the King of France being discovered in a whorehouse. Wondering what such a famous artist was doing in such a low establishment, she wrote out her name: Denise Loubert de Neuilly (the second half being another of her half-baked fantasies) and departed into the snowy depths of December 16, 1976.*
>
> *It all began when I asked her (on her next visit to the whorehouse) what this marvellous*

A BOY & HIS AARDVARK
BY
T. CASEY BRENNAN

1 - SPLASH) In body of panel, show slightly long-haired boy of about twelve or thirteen walking down country road with a friendly looking aardvark. Boy looks bright-eyed and happy. On both sides of the road is a crowd of angry straights. Boy doesn't even notice them. Now -- just above the title, show another picture of the aardvark looking totally disgusted. In this particular panel, the aarvark is playing the role of secondary narrator.

CAPTION: It is with the greatest pleasure that the ~~XXXXXXX~~ editors of this magazine bring you the heartwarming story of ...(TITLE)...A Boy And His Aardvark.

AARDVARK (IN SCENE ABOVE TITLE): Oh no! Not another one of those heartwarming stories! I am ~~really~~ in for it, man!

BOY: Gee, Dandy, we REALLY ~~really~~ had fun today! I wish it could stay this way forever!

VOICE FROM CROWD: Why ain't he out huntin'!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill something?!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill that aardvark?!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill for his country?!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill for his race?!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill for his religion?!

ANOTHER VOICE FROM CROWD: Why don't he kill T. Casey Brennan for writin' this story???!!!

Above: the first page of T. Casey Brennan's script for a "A Boy and His Aardvark" (see cover). Left: the first printing of Power Comics *1, in which the story appeared, long after it had been completed.*

work was to be known as.

"Cerebus." replied she, "You know, like the three-headed dog?"

That night, I drew a fanzine cover, a spot illo and designed a logo. C-E-R-E-B-U-S.. I made up a logo for Loubert Press, as well (I figured this would please her, since her brother and sister were also working on the magazine). Her reaction was one of horror. "Oh, no. Eric Hope is the editor and he won't want it called Loubert Press."

"Well, what's the publishing house going to be called, then?" Reject my logo, will you?

"I'll call Michael and Karen and ask them."

I was going to ask why she didn't call Eric, but chose instead to wedge my tongue between two molars.

"Hi, Michael? We need a name for the

publishing company. You know—like Shadow Press..."

"Michael says Vanaheim Press and Karen says Aardvark Press."

"Why not put the two together?"

If my art career fell through, I was considering becoming a diplomat.

It all began when I drew the logo for the newly christened Aardvark-Vanaheim Press. One was a stylized graphic of an aardvark head with horned helmet. The other was a little more "cartoony". Deni selected the cartoony one. I still sometimes wonder where Eric was through all of this.

Dave Sim: "Tired of his 'nice guy' image, Casey grabbed an empty beer bottle and suggested we stage a photo showing him drunkenly threatening to hit Now & Then Books owner Harry Kremer for daring to ask for an autograph. Another photo of Casey scooping handfuls of cash from the Now & Then Books cash register has gone missing."

I'm not sure what it was written *for* but it's handwritten on the back of "48 Weber Street East" stationery which would indicate it was written after our move to 221 Queen Street South in March of 1979 (when the 48 Weber Street East stationery became scrap paper) and stops dead at this point in the narrative. The repeating "It all began" motif suggests that even at this early point, I was acutely aware of the many tributaries that made up the "Origin of Cerebus."

And, of course, I didn't mention one of my first reactions to the suggested names for the proposed press. "There's that aardvark, again." From the front of a record album to a comic book script to a cartoon show and now to a company logo. I'm not sure how long after the fact it was that I asked Karen *why* she had come up with Aardvark Press. As I indicated to Tasha Robinson of *The Onion*—largely under duress—the only way that I would answer the "Why an aardvark?" question by 2004 (see *Collected Letters,* page 255):

> *It turned out later that a boy that Karen had a major crush on—she was in high school, then—had made a joke posing his hand on a table so that the thumb and three fingers were balanced on their tips like legs and his middle finger was extended like a snout. "Aardvark"* [see front cover for Karen Rittinger (ne Loubert)'s re-enactment]. *When you are a high school girl and you have a crush on someone, these are the sorts of things that stay with you. So I drew a cartoon barbarian aardvark as a mascot for this fanzine publishing company. Later when we realized that what Deni had intended to call the book was* Cerberus, *the three-headed dog who guarded Hades in Greek mythology, I told her we would just make* Cerebus *the name of the aardvark. The fanzine never got off the ground, so I decided to try drawing a sample comic page of* Cerebus the Aardvark. *And, for a number of months that was all that existed: the page that turned out to be page one of* Cerebus *No.1.*

Of course I omitted two of the intermediate steps in this description. One: after the California printer had absconded with the original paste-ups for *Cerebus the Fanzine* and the money we had paid to have it printed (neither Deni or I had been far-sighted enough to get clear copies of the pages made in the event of just such an eventuality), in another side of my multi-faceted career wherein I was hanging on by my fingernails—freelance comic-book creator—I had decided to try and draw a sample comic-book panel of Cerebus the Aardvark not really having any idea of where it might be useful. There were a couple of interesting problems that presented themselves pretty quickly and persuaded me that maybe Cerebus the Aardvark was better left as a one drawing phenomenon. Because his helmet was flying off his head in the logo drawing, I hadn't had to figure out how to fit it in between his ears and it was definitely an awkward drawing problem. Either the helmet had to be ridiculously tiny or the ears had to be unnaturally small and far apart. The other problem was that in the logo, his mouth was

Dave Sim: "I would have to say that the best drawn of T. Casey Brennan's stories for Warren—in a purely illustrative sense—were by Spanish illustrator Felix Mas." Shown here and on page 19, the splash pages for "Dungeons of the Soul" (Creepy *No.45, May 1972) and "The Climbers of the Tower"* (Creepy *No.50, January 1973).*

clearly visible at the side of his snout, but drawing him square on there didn't seem to be a way of making that look right. He appeared to be talking out of the side of his face like a little gray James Cagney or something.

Two: Mike Friedrich of *Star*Reach Productions* had served notice that he was open to any suggestions I might have on how to revive sales on his funny-animal anthology title, *Quack!* which at this point was dying on the vine in spite of (or more likely because of) the inclusion of my own "The Beavers" strips. In a letter dated 22 June 1977 he wrote:

> *Would you mind spending some time someday soon and write me up a short description of just what the hell you're trying to do in "The Beavers"? Why do you do this strip? Where's it going? How do you intend to get there? So far I can't detect much connection between the strips except some vague interest in media and Canadian self-commentary. (And meanwhile* Quack! *seems to be drifting towards "entertainment humor", whatever that means; though so far your strips have stayed within whatever vague boundaries I've set).*
>
> *Looks like my cover idea for* Quack #3 *isn't so hot; after the initial orders the book is just sitting here. It's not nearly as well-selling as* Star*Reach *and actually is falling off in sales. I'm at a bit of a loss for ideas. Any suggestions? I could use a bit of your critical facilities.*

The impression I had been left with from this characteristically blunt communiqué from my editor-in-chief was that a couple of my fingernails had just slipped and my visions of a cover featuring "The Beavers" on *Quack!* being the launch point to riches, fame and glory (the only honest answer to Mike's question of "Why do you do this strip?") was, as a result, dissipating quickly. It didn't take a rocket scientist to realize that "entertainment humor" was a discrete euphemism for "not funny". I brought my "critical facilities" to bear and asked the obvious question: why was it that *Howard the Duck* was still a hit and *Quack!* was a miss? The answer, it seemed to me was that *Howard the Duck* featured a funny animal in the world of humans whereas the *Quack* material seemed to consist of funny animals solely in their own milieu. As far as I recall, I first presented this to Mike as a theory in response to his request for my suggestions. Certain as I was that Mike would share my sense that this was a "Eureka" moment in the history of funny animal comics, I wasn't prepared for his response from 12 September 1977:

> *Some bad news:*
>
> *1) I don't feel comfortable with your lettering on Gene Day's dramatic stories and so I've asked him to have it sent out here for that work. Your style works excellently with your own "Beavers" work and on the one "Quack" story Gene did for me, but I seem to prefer a crisper, more regular style on dramatic stories and you aren't there. Sorry.*
>
> *2) Bigger, though, is my decision on what to do with* Quack *(I'd expressed to you my problems with it before). What I've decided is two-fold: first to cut it back to twice a year (I'll be starting up an SF/Fantasy spin-off called* Imagine*...putting continued features in* Star*Reach *and the non-series short stories in the 2nd title...this will alternate with* Quack *on my publishing schedule), second, to cut back the strips to two or three:* [Steve] *Leialoha's rabbit...and* [Michael] *Gilbert's "Wraith" ...and* [Ted] *Richard's "Quack" (his spin-off from "E.Z. Wolf"), if Ted can make it.*
>
> *This leaves you out. I know this isn't the most exciting of events for you, but I hope you don't take it overly hard. I have liked aspects of "The Beavers" (as I have liked parts of the other strips I'm dropping), but I don't think it fits in with*

my expectations nor my feeling as to what market I'm going after. As I've said before, my thinking about Quack *has been very soft and I've made this decision reluctantly, since I'm still not totally confident it's "correct", but the best thing I feel I can do at this point is pull in a bit, retreat to a smaller base if you will, and try to get better bearings from there.*

I was certain that I had hit on a key point of marketability and—grasping at straws even as I was getting edged aside—put together what would become the splash page of issue one of *Cerebus*. As far as I could see, if my theory was correct, I was in a race against whomever else might bring the next "funny animal in the world of humans" to market ahead of me. I figured all I need to do was to *show* Mike what I envisioned and he would "get it". However he wrote in his letter of 30 September 1977:

Anyway, some specifics: sometimes timing is everything. Your splash page for CEREBUS *brought an immediate smile…but I'm gonna be stubborn about this pull-back (meaning I'm gonna give it a couple of issues…that is, a year…to see how it goes before making any changes or additions). I've heard a rumor that Denis Kitchen is starting up a funny-animal book, but don't know anything more; I'll let you know if I hear this is true. If not, keep developing the idea every now and then anyway. It'll find it's place.*

Years later he told me that, sticking to his intention to "pull back," he had rejected *Elfquest* as well in September of 1977.

Having very few professional options at that point, I took a hard look at the splash page of *Cerebus the Aardvark* and asked myself a core question: "Did I really believe that the key to the viability of a funny animal title was that there be only one funny animal and all of the other characters had to be human?" Yes, I was still pretty sure that that was the case. Which led to even more of a core question: If I did really believe that, then why was I trying to get Mike Friedrich to publish it and sharing the revenues with him?

Why not publish it through the moribund Aardvark-Vanaheim imprint, getting Deni to do the nuts-and-bolts business side?

The rest, as they say, is history.

IV. The Origins Interview: Dave Sim on "Way Back When"

FC: *In the introduction to* Cerebus *5 from* Swords of Cerebus *vol.2, you said, "This was around the time I got Cerebus' origin straight in my head." What, if anything were you thinking about the character and his "origin" before this point (i.e. issues 1-4)?*

Sim: Well, on issues 1-3 I was really just concentrating on doing three really funny *Conan* parodies and putting them out on time with the same logo, same format, etc. There was the attempted wedding of Robert E. Howard with classic Warner Brothers cartoons—a good example being the splash page of the first issue with Cerebus bumping up and down in the saddle. That was a direct swipe of Yosemite Sam. But the emphasis was on the Warner Brothers quality. How do I produce a good animated short? Just having a funny animal in place of Conan bought me some time and space—it was inherently funny—but it was only going to be inherently funny on its own for an issue or two. About the only concession to continuity was getting Michael to draw the map so that—if *Cerebus* kept going—I wouldn't have to be trying to place locations after the fact.

FC: *Were you actively trying to define an origin for Cerebus? Is "origin" even the right word?*

DS: In the sense that a funny animal in the world of humans raises certain immediate questions in the context of the narrative, yes, definitely. Howard the Duck got zapped here from another dimension. Superman came to earth when the distant planet Krypton exploded. It's a key element of comic-book realities that you're supposed to explain unusual core elements. That's why Joe Matt wanted Chester to explain how President Reagan's head got onto the end of Ed's penis. On one side of the comic-book field, that's a requirement. There is an implied negotiation with the reader as to the extent to which the reader is required to willingly suspend his disbelief. Superman is able to fly because the earth's gravity is less than Krypton's. No explanation as to how a rocket made it across trillions of light years of space, so that isn't part of the negotiation. On Chester's side of the comic-book field, President Reagan's head ended up on the end of Ed's penis, take it or leave it.

What occurred early on was that I had to develop my own explanation of "Cerebus: who he is and how he came to be" and to do it in such a way that I could cover all the necessary bases for the Joe Matts in the crowd. By the time I had it all worked out in my head in a satisfactory fashion the narrative was moving away from the high fantasy end of things that's amenable to sustaining those sorts of story interpolations. "Know you, O prince…" etc. etc. It kept getting pushed further and further ahead. The Judge was a good candidate to lay it all out, chapter and verse, but Cerebus wasn't interested in "The Origin of Cerebus" so that wasn't one of the

questions he wanted answered on the Moon. Ultimately it had to wait until we had our own little chat in *Minds.*

FC: *You also said that issue 5 ended on a "completely self-indulgent" note that the reader wasn't necessarily supposed to understand. Would you shed light on what that "note" was now, or is it still none of the reader's business?*

DS: I just went back and reread the issue, and I honestly can't remember what I was referring to except, perhaps, that I had at the time an inbuilt atheistic loathing for worship of any kind, and that I might have seen Cerebus destroying the aardvark statue as being self-indulgent of what I would have seen as my personal "anti-worship" foible.

FC: *Issue 5 is critical, of course, for exactly that reason—because Cerebus destroys the Pigt idol only later to discover (from you) that had he been in possession of sword, helmet and medallions, he would have ended up with "the conquest (he) always dreamed of." The* Cerebus *narrative from issues 6 through 200 is essentially the result of Cerebus having made a rash and possibly wrong choice. And Cerebus seems to consistently make wrong choices. Did you know this early on that one of the themes of* Cerebus *would be about wrong choices and their consequences?*

DS: Yes, by issue 5 I was two issues past the initial stage of seeing if I could get three issues done and published and out to the stores, so that meant I was now in different territory—how long could I keep going? It was an entirely new experience for me—the first time I had put down a bet and won. Having lost all of my previous bets that presented a lot of questions: how long was I going to keep betting, how much was I going to bet? and so on. I always assumed that I lost my previous bets because I made wrong choices so I was far more familiar with wrong choices than right choices. Relative to what Cerebus wanted to accomplish—world conquest—it seemed to me at the time that destroying a statue that gave him leverage over an entire culture was not the smartest thing in the world to do. He didn't want to be aligned with the statue or linked to the statue so he destroyed the statue. It would have been more sensible to make use of the statue while bearing in mind that there was no actual link there—that would've been my best thinking at the time.

My assessment of the decision would change over time. The problem with making use of the statue while bearing in mind that there was no actual link between the two of them is that you are buying into an idolatrous situation where you yourself are considered an idol. Whatever you may think inwardly to yourself isn't going to figure very prominently in the course of events if you allow the link to be made in the mind of others and allow that choice to play out.

FC: *We get a few clues about Cerebus' parents here and there, especially in* Going Home *and* Form & Void. *Is either of the parents an aardvark?*

DS: In a readily identifiable sense, no. One or the other of them might have had three toes or very pronounced toenails, somewhat pointed ears, patches of gray fur. Those kinds of things, but if you met them in the village market you wouldn't think they were "aardvarkian."

FC: *Cirin had a human son, as did Cerebus (though a human wife), so a human can descend from an aardvark. But can an aardvark descend from a human (or two humans), and if so, how can this be possible? In* Reads, *Po tells Cerebus that this is the first time in history that three aardvarks have existed simultaneously, so that rules out the normal procedure of man-aardvark and woman-aardvark giving birth to baby-aardvark (unless the man always died before the birth of the baby).*

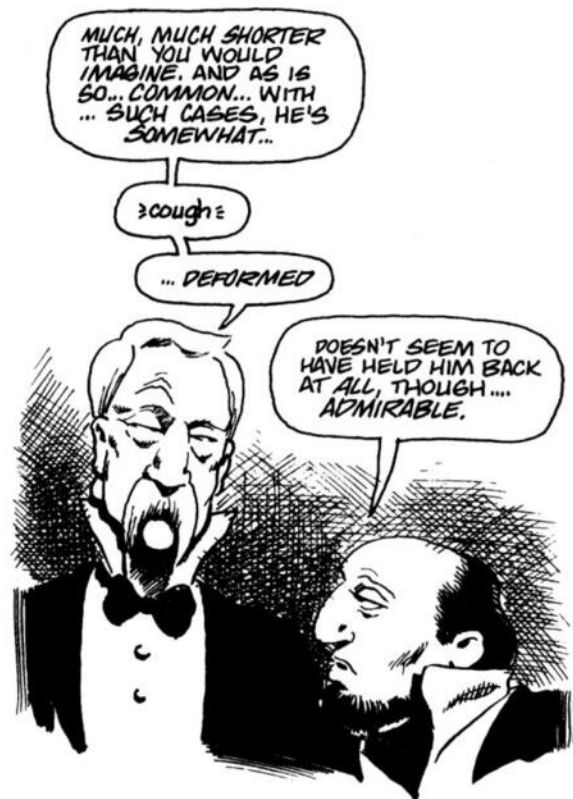
DS: Well, yes, exactly. The whole notion of spontaneous generation was something that had been with me for some time, and it really came about because in my family the women were forever trying to figure out where I got my artistic talent from. Both of my parents were deemed to be artistic, but both of them were actually just copyists, as was my sister. If you gave them a picture or a photograph,

A Comics Buyer's Guide *ad from 1977*

they could do a reasonably accurate copy of it given a sufficient amount of time. But it was a deep belief in my family that I got my artistic side from my parents and from a maiden aunt. It was my first exposure to the YHWHist idea that human beings are like leaves and branches of family plants and that all of your characteristics derive from earlier leaves and branches. If I was artistic, I must've gotten that from my maiden aunt, who was an amateur oil painter, or I must've gotten it from my mother, who did charcoal drawings from album covers on occasion. Of course, there was no precedent for a writer in the family, so that just got glossed over. The only important characteristics were those that "grew" out of the previous generation. But my talents and interests, to me, were not attributable in that sense. They were individualized and exclusively centered on the comic-book medium, which was universally deplored and reviled in my family so, to me, that nature of mine had occurred spontaneously in a family tree that had no precedent for it. So that seemed applicable as a story point and core element of the "Origin of Cerebus" as it evolved in my mind. Why aren't there hundreds of aardvarks running around? Why is Cerebus the only one? Answer: aardvarks occurred spontaneously in human families but were a dramatically rare occurrence. Of course, much later on, I realized that this had much in common with prophethood, which likewise occurred spontaneously—or in what appeared to be a spontaneous fashion and which I see as being a core element of God's overall plan: that the actual nature of individual beings is decided by God alone, that each soul is individual and that only minor physical characteristics and mannerisms are actually "passed on" in the "plant-like" sense in which women usually mean the term.

FC: *One of the running jokes of* Howard the Duck *was his constantly hearing "You're a duck!" everywhere he went. You waste no time satirizing this—page two of the first issue, and the phrase isn't even completed; Cerebus immediately pulls a sword on the bartender, who ends up saying, "You're a—guest!" Early on, I figured the lack of surprise was because people were used to seeing aardvarks running around all the time. But later it becomes clear that this was not the case. So why were more people not surprised or curious at Cerebus' appearances (even if they didn't voice that astonishment directly to his face)?*

DS: One of the reasons is that everyone knows what a duck looks like and what an anthropomorphized duck looks like—thanks to Walt Disney studios—so it was a more natural reaction. Even if you knew what an aardvark was—which, I can tell you from experience, most people don't—you wouldn't have been likely to make the connection just by looking at Cerebus.

I would say that it's an implied element of Cerebus' nature that different people see him in different ways and that no one sees him as he actually appears in the book. One of the story points that I never got to was to have an artist attempt to render

a portrait of him, to show the dozens and dozens of failed attempts all of which would have elements of Cerebus to them but which would never quite add up to a likeness. The human part of the artist would be trying to render Cerebus in the likeness of a human—rendering the eyes separately, putting the ears in the right spot and making them the right size, shrinking the nose and putting the mouth under it—and consequently driving himself to drink. If you look specifically at the ears, you see normal ears but when you stand back and look at the overall effect, it looks nothing like him. "At the Club One Afternoon" (*Church & State Vol.1* pgs. 154-155) is the closest that I got to depicting how people react to Cerebus' appearance: that he's shorter than he initially appears to be and that he's somewhat deformed. It can probably be attributed to the "Magnifier" quality that he has. His perception of himself dominates any individual in his immediate environment, certainly anyone within visual range of him.

Where were YOU in '77?

In this issue we heard from Mike Friedrich, Bud Plant, Chuck Rozanski, and Buddy Saunders about the comics scene of 1977 as *Cerebus* entered the world.

We invite store owners and fans to send us their reminiscences, especially if you have photos from the period. We'll run these in future issues!

See page 32 for our address.

About Last Issue

by Dave Sim

Having lampooned Gary Groth of *The Comics Journal* in *Latter Days* (page 277-78) as Gary Growth, interviewing fictitious reads author Garth Inniscent for *The Reads Journal* for his endless repetition of "Right. Right," as his share of the interviews that he has conducted, I had to wince inwardly any number of times while transcribing these eight interviews whenever I heard myself saying "Right, right." I'd be inputting Seth's or Frank Miller's words and thinking to myself, "PLEASE don't say, 'Right, right' when they're done. PLEASE don't." And, sure enough, the next sound I would hear would be Dave going, "Right, right." You can edit them out if you want—and I did with a bunch of them—but then it looks as if the interview subject is just steamrolling ahead and bouncing from subject to subject without pausing to take a breath. Anyway, it did get to be quite funny after a while and I did want to apologize to Gary for taking what is just an implicit necessity of the Q&A format and making it seem like journalistic laziness.

Craig Thompson

One part of the interview that I was sort of sorry to lose was when Craig spontaneously asked at one point if I planned to interview Art Spiegelman for the "Advise & Consent" piece. I told him that, frankly, I wasn't sure that Art Spiegelman would speak to me. "Oh, did you two have a falling out?" he asked. What I said was, "I think I've had a falling out with just about everyone in the comic-book field at this point". The more honest answer would've been, "I'm not sure that Art Spiegelman would have any awareness of me as someone remotely near his Big League Avant Garde Status. He mentioned in a *Comics Journal* interview that he has had students of his try to force my work on him—it sounded from his description like the prison scene at the end of *Jaka's Story* (pages 353 to 400)—and that he just found my work mannered, all these solid black panels that take up an entire issue. Reading between the lines, it seemed to me to be a conflict between perceptions of the nature of the graphic novel and the comic book. Two and a half issues of largely black panels are certainly going to look mannered as two-and-a-half comic books, less so when seen as fifty pages of a 500-page graphic novel.

I told Chester Brown the story and mentioned to him that I had recently found two phone numbers for Art Spiegelman written in Karen McKiel's handwriting—which places their entry there at 1989 or earlier—in one of the Aardvark-Vanaheim phone directories. I have no idea who gave me the numbers or why. Chester mentioned that Spiegelman was still living in the same place that he had been in the 1980s, so one of the numbers might still be valid. "You think I should phone Art Spiegelman?" I asked, incredulously. He gave me one of his characteristic contorted Chester Brown shrugs that means roughly, "If you WANT" coupled with "I don't see why NOT" and with underpinnings of "Let's not turn this into another Dave Sim the Evil Misogynist Pariah conversations" and "if you do turn it into a DSEMP conversation, you KNOW that I'm only going to pretend that the Art Spiegelman side of reality is far more open-minded than we both know it is".

Then later in the interview, Craig asked, "Are you going to interview Chris Ware?"

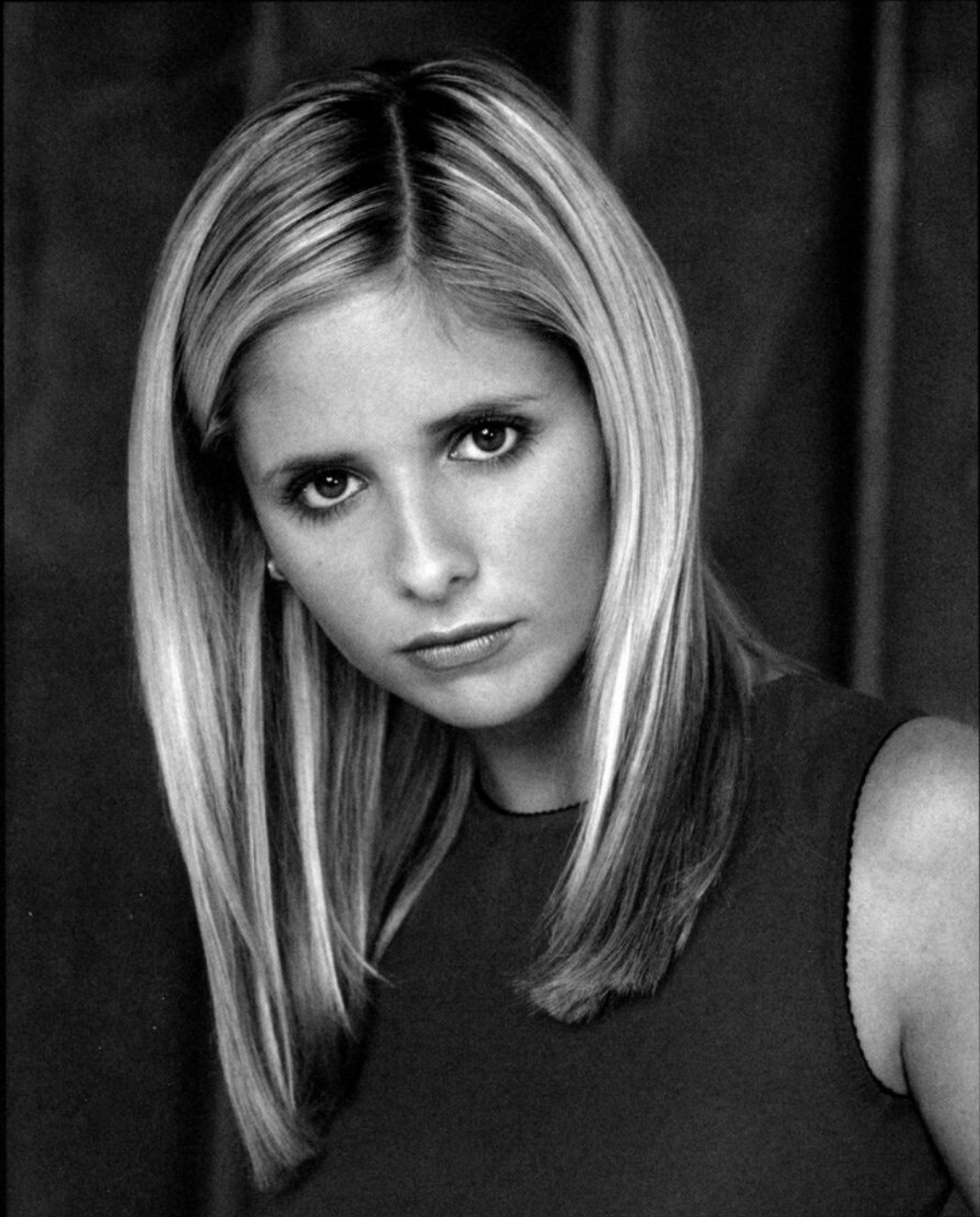
My mind boggles at these points. I told him I had a number for Chris Ware—he had been one of a number of participants in a *Overstreet Fan* jam cover I had coordinated back around 1993—but I was pretty sure it was out of date. So Craig volunteers to give me the Chris Ware number that he has that Chris Ware evidently gave him.

As I say, my mind boggles. Maybe I'm the one who's crazy in these situations. So I phoned the number and got an answering machine and left a message explaining what I was doing and asking him to give me a call back if he was interested in participating. And, of course, I never heard a word.

So at least I know *I'm* not the crazy one around here.

(continued on page 37)

Above: a Thompson Blankets *rough that we didn't have room for in* FC 5.

Dave Sim's Favorite Buffy Pic This Month

This is an interesting one. There could very well have been a lot of work done on this on the computer, smoothing out any zits and that kind of thing, but all of that aside, you can certainly see that the studio got what they were paying for. Flawless skin, beautiful hair, gorgeous green eyes and a look that can hold down any position on the range from high school senior (what she was portraying) to mid-twenties career woman (which is what she was). Not to mention a look that would register with women as 'Hey, I don't take any crap from anybody.' and with men as 'Ain't she sweet?' but still able to bring off the complete "prep school" impression that would be implied by the name "Buffy"—a trick that the movie Buffy wasn't able to manage, which is, I suspect, why the television show was so much more successful than the movie.

(Sarah Michelle Gellar from the fifth season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*)

Mind Games

Write to us at:
Following Cerebus
P.O. Box 1283
Arlington, TX 76004

e-mail:
editors@followingcerebus.com

We haven't had a letters column since issue 4, and even on that one we didn't get caught up, so we're way behind, as a few of these letters will reveal. But we didn't want just to ignore them, so here they are. Time for everyone to send us a new batch. We're particualrly interested in getting feedback on this issue's "Many Origins of Cerebus" series of articles, being more "Cerebus-centric" than the past couple of issues.

Hi,

I was asked by a Mr. Dave Sim to send this page to you. It's his appearance in my comic, *Lethargic Lad*, after he put me in his Cerebus comical book, where I appeared much larger than I really am, resulting in lots of people who I haven't seen in a long time calling me up and asking, "Greg, have you put on weight?" Anyway, he told me that you were putting together a parody issue of *Following Cerebus* and said this was one of his favorite pages and hopes it would be included. Dave also did a cover for one of my other comics that was a parody of the Cerebus #1 cover.

Greg Hyland
e-mail

This was intended for FC *3, but even at 48 pages we just flat ran out of room, so here it is. See, we told you we were behind.*

To "After Cerebus,"

First of all, thank you so much for *Following Cerebus!!* I haven't read the Windsor-Smith interview nor the essay called "The Challenge of Dave Sim's Storytelling" yet, but so far I can only applaud the honest seriousness with which articles approach the Sim/Gerhard creation. I long ago began thinking of Dave Sim as "the James Joyce of comic-books," but even saying that trivializes the serious dedication it took to see the Cerebus saga through to its end. The series deserves the kind of attention you are giving it.

That said, however, I worry a little that concentration on The BIG Picture has, so far, ignored vast aspects of the whole. I am heartened by the suggestion that *FC* 3 will tackle parody and satire, two huge aspects of Dave Sim's work and of his own personality.

So far, though, you have spent most of your attention on Dave Sim the writer, ignoring the equally important fact that Dave Sim *drew Cerebus*. In dealing with his story, you have ignored his art.

I read somewhere that every year for a long stretch the award for "Best Lettering" went to Sim automatically, though there's more to it than that. Sim had a stunning ear for the verbal. Take the transliteration of accent on page 77 of *Melmoth* for instance, when Mick says:

"sCUES me oy down' mean to INNERUP' you an' your ehm FRIEN'
Bu' DINT yow ehm used to ehm Din't yow used t'be the POWP?"

And when Cerebus answers "aye" Mick says "I PHOUGHT sow."

The way Sim draws the words, with occasional

underlining of a word or a syllable, ADDS to their sounds. (Look! I automatically find myself using capitals and double-spaces between my words to emphasize how I Hear myself Talking!) Then, he Floats those words, written fairly small, in fairly Large dialogue-balloons (esPECially Cerebus's small, soft, direct "aye" overpage), and that gives the feeling that the conversation takes place barely above a whisper. Contrast that with the big square balloons (p.84) of an irate waitress as she shouts

"NO loitering NO loitering I'M in charge of the patio! I'M in charge of the patio! ME! and what I say GOES!"

In these few pages it's obviously not the "writing" nor the "storytelling" nor even the expressively drawn faces alone that convey the sound and the emotion in what's said. I mean, on p.87, when this harridan stomps out, notice that the words get slightly smaller as they go down the panel:
STOMP
STOMP
STOM
And that last P actually hides behind the edge of the damn door she's gone through! This is the subtlety of a master craftsman at the height of his powers. And remember in GUYS "Cer'buz buggid 'a' Scodge!"? Examples are endless....

Then again there's the tons of serious research Sim did. I read somewhere that he used to run old classic cartoons and examine them frame-by-frame to figure out how they got their effects.

Take again in *Melmoth* (since it's here, open on my desk) pages 160-166, where is his name Pusey(?) sneeks into town skulking and hiding behind things, is at first terrified of his own reflection in a window's glass, then amused by his own fears, and at the end hauled off to five years of hard labor by a trio of Cirinist "Brown-Blouses" (my phrase).

Until the last, the sequence is wordless (save for one!), yet at every step the story of this little guy, his face all wary eyes, is perfectly clear. The one word is a series of huge heart-shaped balloons with the word "pOund" in them expressing the terrified pounding of his frightened heart. And notice the over-large O in that word!

Throughout the years of making *Cerebus*, Sim was at pains to explore new ways and methods and techniques of telling stories *visually*—not just with carefully crafted lettering, but with inserts into panels, repetitions of panels, full-page panels, flipping the book for a time side-ways to expand to what I would call "CinemaScopic" panels, parallel story-lines, pixilated compositions, flashes both back and forward, vast empty panels like near the end of *High Society*, series' of tall, thin, crammed panels (pp.957 - 976 of *Church & State* I), and the vast stretches of *Reads* that eschew drawings at all!

I don't think there's anyone in the comics business who has worked harder or more rewardingly at expanding the potentials of visual story-telling techniques than Dave Sim, though there are lots and lots of magnificent also-rans. Throughout his career, Jack Kirby did exactly that, though he restricted himself by shackling his art to the hack-work of third-rate writers like Stan Lee. Frank Miller's startling leap into a black-and-white world once he started self-publishing was an artistic break-through. Will Eisner's two careers—first as the creator and editor of *The Spirit* and then beginning again with *A Contract With God* to do what we now call graphic novels—is studded with visual discoveries. Dave McKean's *Cages*, concentrating on pages in black-with-one-added-color and occasional photo-collages, expands horizons. Milo Manara in Italy and Jean ("Moebius") Giraud in France and the earlier issues of *Heavy Metal* magazine here in America opened comic-readers' eyes incredibly. And Wendy Pini's *Elfquest* series is also a noteworthy achievement.

But none of them concentrated for twenty years on one continuing story!

One vesuvius of visual story-telling creativity is Michael Zulli. Like *Cerebus*, Zulli's work in the unfinished series *The Puma Blues*—with Stephen Murphy as writer—is a whole textbook on how to use the composition of a comics-page to tell stories. Of course, a character named "M.Zulli" shows up in *Cerebus*, mostly (as I remember) in *Reads*. And the entire run of *The Puma Blues* was an Aardvark-Vanaheim publication.

So, if you can, I'd like to suggest that some day soon you either interview "Michael Zulli" (who I think still lives in Massachusetts west of here) or, better yet, arrange for Dave Sim himself to do it. I'd also love to see what might happen if the two of them were to set up a drawing-board and try a visual "jam-session"!!

I met Dave Sim, only briefly, twice—at signings at The Million Year Picnic store over in Cambridge and a comics-fair here in Boston (where I also met Zulli and watched him draw someone's portrait). Those days are packed in my memory beside my visits to the E.C. office, and the dinner Bill Gaines took me to shortly before he died. Ever since I wrote "critiques" of every issue of the E.C. Comics in the early '50s (yeah, I'm *that* Larry Stark!), I have loved *good* comics. That's what Dave and Ger made. *Damn* Good Comics!

Thank you for giving their work the attention it so richly deserves.
Break a leg all!
Love,
===Anon.
(a.k.a. Larry Stark)

You're right, Larry, about our early emphasis on Dave's writing, as we've noted before. FC 4 was going to be our "art of Cerebus*" issue until it swerved into a Will Eisner tribute issue. But know that we are blown away by Dave and Gerhard's art and will certainly be devoting attention to*

it in future issues. Part of our thinking in early on was to approach Cerebus *from somewhat fresh angles, and we think our "Something Fell" and "Storytelling" essays did that to a degree.*

We'd love to include a Michael Zulli interview at some point.

The next few letters followed a message that we posted (actually that Hal Brandt posted at our request) on on the Yahoo Cerebus group. Because of the recurring Following Cerebus *feature "Dave Sim's Favorite Buffy the Vampire Slayer Pic of the Month," some readers have assumed (logically) that Dave is a fan of the series. Actually, he's never seen an episode. But he is a fan of Sarah Michelle Gellar—or at least an admirer of photos of the actress (again, completely understandable). We asked Dave whether he would be interested in reviewing an episode of the series, just for fun; he said he would if "Buffy is sufficiently a subject of general interest. I'll leave it up to you to decide after you've had a chance to quiz a few* Following Cerebus *readers." The responses we got—some of which are below—show that there was no consensus, so we should just go ahead and trust our instincts.*

We've sent him the episode "Passion" from the second season, one of our favorites but also, based on "favorite lists" and things we've seen over the years, underrated (it would be too easy to send Dave what is probably the consensus "greatest episode," "The Body"). More importantly, the episode deals with a lot of the emotion-versus-reason issues that Dave has written so much about.

Dave will be watching the episode sometime in the next couple of weeks. With any luck, something will appear in FC *7, our "TV Issue" (see inside front cover for more info)—unless we've misjudged, and Dave finds nothing inspiring or noteworthy or controversial or interesting about the episode. In which case our quess will be wrong, and we'll ask Dave to review an old episode of* Welcome Back, Kotter *instead.*

Dear *Following Cerebus*,

Sorry, I've never been a fan of the show. The idea doesn't interest me:(

But if Dave writes it, I'll read it!

Jeff Tundis
e-mail

Hello,

As a big fan of both *Buffy: TVS* and *Cerebus*, I would love to see Dave review an episode (or two) of *Buffy*. Even if he dislikes the show and rips it apart, it'd be interesting to read his view of it. Since it is too early in the morning, I really can't think of one particular episode I'd like for Dave to review. I just wanted to say I'm all for the idea.

Margaret
www.cerebusfangirl.com

Hi:

Like Dave, I've never seen an episode of *Buffy*, so I can't say whether I would find Dave's review of an episode interesting or not. As a regular feature in *FC*, it might wear thin, but a one-shot could be a good read. I just hope that whatever Dave thinks of *Buffy*, he doesn't blame Yoohwhoo.

Hal Brandt
e-mail

Dear Craig Miller and John Thorne,

Congratulations on the first *Following Cerebus* issue (#3) with almost no images of Cerebus himself in it whatsoever. Apart from the repeat of one of the three covers on page 45, the only other appearance of the earth pig occurs on page 40, which is a repeat of "Pretense and the Truth: The Challenges of Dave Sim's Storytelling" from the previous issue.

Otherwise another great issue.

Eroom Nala
e-mail

Point taken. We noted this ourselves and did a little better with issues 4 and 5. This issue moves things a little more in the right direction.

Still, for issue 3: isn't Dave and Gerhard's recreation of the Frazetta cover pretty much worth the price of the entire issue anyway?

To the editors:

I enjoyed *FC* 3. I was very much interested in the discussion of copyright, and I regret that I can't really refer to the usual on-line discussion sites to Sim's article.

I, for one, remember Boris the Bear! In fact, I have never read *Cerebus*, since it was too big by the time I got into comics.

Lee Sandlin made a few errors regarding Samuel Beckett and the Netherlands. The production in question did not change Beckett's words in *Waiting for Godot,* but cast the all-male cast as an all-female cast. Beckett sued to block the production and lost in the Dutch courts. For that, he refused to license any of his work in Holland ever again.

This is quite unlike the Tharlan Mellison case. Mr. T. M. was concerned with controlling the distribution of his work, as is his right under copyright law. In contrast, Beckett was concerned with controlling the integrity of his work and with it, his name, as he thought was his right under the terms of the play's license. (Of course, licenses are needed because of copyright law.)

Playwrights, in general, are in a difficult position regarding the integrity of their art. They depend on directors and actors to present their work. The latter can just as easily ruin a playwright as make him. A famous example is Richard Dreyfuss (in the film version of Neil Simon *The Goodbye Girl*) playing a struggling actor in the role of Richard III, whose director conceived the idea that Richard's real handicap was that he was a flaming homosexual, with a lisp and all that. Needless to say, he remained struggling after the show was laughed into closing. (Of course, everyone now knows Shakespeare is quality material, but if it had been a new or fairly new play, the playwright and the actor would have

both suffered.)

It should be noted that Beckett took a Sim-like attitude to parodies and the like. When an unauthorized sequel to *Waiting for Godot* showed up in the mid-60s, Beckett took no action whatsoever, although it was fully within his legal rights to squash it. He interpreted it as legitimate, if downright bizarre, commentary on his own play, and let it die of its own silliness. He frequently permitted stagings of his prose.

Matthew P Wiener
e-mail

Dear *Following Cerebus*,

Hi folks. You have a great publication and thanks for keeping Dave talking.

Just the other day I picked up *Following Cerebus* 1 (after already purchasing 2 and 3) and am glad to finally read "Following the Trail of Something That Fell." It is incredibly insightful. In fact I believe it led me to see the ultimate fate of Jaka, though I could be wrong.

In *Form & Void*, while Cerebus and Jaka are stuck in the blizzard, we see on pg. 568 that Ham's gun is in their tent and again in pg. 571. After they escape from the tent and make it to town, there is a scene on pg. 612 where Cerebus is in the bedroom, and on the other side of the door (which we see—through a mirror), Jaka is being told by one of the Mothers that "Possession of a firearm by an UNMARRIED individual is subject to the most SEVERE repercussions IMAGINABLE." Jaka then enters the bedroom with a "KaKlak-Klak" of the door and a "Thump" on the bed. Maybe it's just me, but just to the right of the bed there appears to be some kind of ornament with a crossbow hanging from or part of it. On pg. 615, Jaka says that she left Missy, her doll, in the tent. When Cerebus and Jaka finally make it to Sand Hills Creek, there is only Mr. Morton to see them. As Cerebus runs down to meet him, Jaka finds this to be the best time to show off how *unmarried* they are. On pg. 677 she is walking towards the two, and with a "What the!?" look on her face, the damn thing fell. With a "Brush-Brush" she pats off the dirt from her behind. On pg. 682 Cerebus gives Jaka the big *scram* and walks away from her. A "Ching" appears behind her. On pg. 683 the "Ching" shows to be from a horse and carriage with one of the Mothers there, holding Missy. The Mothers had found the tent. On pg. 684 Jaka takes Missy from the Mother and enters the carriage where the Mother raps the roof of the carriage with a "Tump-Tump" of her cane. There is a "Snap" of the whip, and the horses draw the carriage "Ching-Ching-Ching"ing away.

Yep, there is no way in Hell that the young woman named Sher at the end of "Latter Days" could possibly be Jaka, even with decades of rhinoplasty.

Thanks again for giving me more clues to what has got to be the best novel, graphic or otherwise, I have ever read. One day I would like to write to Dave Sim himself, but I am at a total loss at what to say. But I will tell you this, and I believe that word

By: Bashful Bry

will get to Dave: it is because of *Cerebus* that I believe in God. I found Him in *Minds* back in 2001. I mean, who else but God would know where I would be looking at the time? I have also found Dave's words to ring more true every day. The story of Cerebus's life has been very personal and familiar to me, that being told that God is anything but real is like being told to ignore the flying pink elephant. I'll thank Dave myself, but thank you for not ignoring him.
Michael D. Christoffers
e-mail
P.S.: It was a tragedy to see Cerebus to go on and out through life as he did. But I believe that it is better (and more merciful) to learn from other people's mistakes instead of suffering them ourselves.

And later Michael wrote us again:

Hi Guys,

By any chance did any of you read *DC: The New Frontier?* Is it just me, or does anyone else see the incredible simalarities between the Center and Dave Sim's commentaries of the YHWH? Seriously, from how it acts, how it thinks, and how it makes others think. A *mass* of indifference.
Michael D. Christoffers
e-mail

Hmm, haven't read The New Frontiers.

Dear *Following Cerebus*,

Just got done reading your Will Eisner tribute issue in *Following Cerebus* 5. Very good issue and checklist. However, you missed a portfolio in the "Et Cetera" portion of checklist. Will contributed a beautiful print called "Strength of Man" dated 1985. That was also the name of the signed & limited portfolio (1500) which was printed in 1987 by Blackthorne Publishing. Other contributors were Bill Sienkiewicz, Moebius, Jeff Jones, George Pratt and Scott Hampton to name a few. Thanks for excellent issue.
Mark Hauck
e-mail

Thanks for the note, Mark. Yes, that is a great portfolio!

Dear Craig and John,

I've been pondering Dave's assertion that *Cerebus* is the longest sustained narrative in literature. I assume he would rule out Harold Grey's *Little Orphan Annie* as having too little structure—not much of a beginning, lots of middle, and no end. In fact, if an ending by the original creator is a requirement, that rules out most long lived comic strips. *Dr. Who*, and other long running television programs, can be ruled out as too episodic. *The Mahabharata* at first seems a likely candidate, but might be objected to as too incoherent, in the technical sense of not cohering into a unified whole. Patrick O'Brien's twenty-volume series, beginning with *Master and Commander*, has a beginning, middle, and end, and is certainly a sustained narrative, but in page count it is slightly shorter than Cerebus. How about *Dark Shadows?* More than 1200 half-hour episodes with a beginning, middle, and end, crafted by the guiding hand of Dan Curtis. One could, I think, easily read all of *Cerebus* in a mere 200 hours, while watching all of *Dark Shadows* (a project I am currently engaged in) will take more than 500 hours.
Rick Norwood
Comics Revue
e-mail

And now the third Michael Christoffers letter!

Dear Following Cerebus,

A little while ago I wrote you concerning why I think that Jaka was *killer* by the Cirinists, thanks to your article on "Something Fell." Now, some time later, it occurs to me about Cerebus's final fall is more than just Cerebus "standing around until Cerebus grows old, falls over, and dies."

Please forgive me for my lack of page numbers and details because I currently do not have my copy of *The Last Day* in front of me. But, anyway, for all the events of something falling, it seems to be more than just being related to death. If I am recalling correctly, these events are more about someone being killed. Whether it is murder, execution, or assasination, it's not some natural occurance (well, Mickey Knox would say that "murder is pure"). Even the scenes of something that *almost* fell, like Cerebus and Jaka on the river boat at the end of *Going Home,* if Jaka did fall, those Cirinists would have done what they came there to do, and that is to take. Cerebus. out. Or how about the scene where Astoria just avoided a metaphorical crusifixion (ever the martyr, she would have liked that indeed).

This now leads me to Cerebus's death. In Dave Sim's commentaries of *The Last Day*, he points out the scenes where Shep-Shep (yes, yes, Sheshep, whatever) would have things like the lamp turn on, or have the stool move under and away from him without using his hands— "creepy." I know that there is one panel in this book (again, please forgive these missing details) depicting Shep-Shep touching with his finger, and with a facial expression I can not explain, looking down on the very stool which I now believe *threw* Cerebus to his death. Shep-Shep knew that he was going to anger Cerebus (why else do it if not for at least a reaction, especially the wanted reaction which that side of the family seems to be good at).

A quick digression: this scene I find to resemble the scene in *Church & State* where an old Weishaupt is struck to the floor and told to go to hell by Cerebus. And judging by Shep-Shep's attitude when telling Cerebus how he upset the new believers, the Muslims, for what he did to their God, well, as my

wife once told me, "Women have many ways to tell someone to go to hell." Just as well, I hear the Chinese have a lot of hells.

But back to Shep-Shep angering Cerebus. So we have Shep-Shep pissing Cerebus off, then Shep-Shep leaves the door open when he exits the room. I do not think that this was an oversight by Shep-Shep. I believe that he was no longer concerned "Dead men can't dismember their sons" as it were. Cerebus makes a go for Shep-Shep (just like his son, and probably his wife, wanted) and FOOOM~~~~~~snap-fwump.

Thanks again for you patience. I certainly hope I am on to something. I will be wasting your time if this is just a dead end.

Truly loving your work,
Michael D. Christoffers
e-mail

Dear Sirs:

Among my many visits to San Diego was ProCon a few years ago. There were only three people in the room on the Will Eisner seminar. I had the opportunity to ask him any question I wanted, and I did. I asked questions about the *Dreamer, Last Days in Vietnam*, and what his thoughts on the business were. The others there had few questions for him, so I pretty much had his attention for about an hour. I think of the many times he shared his wisdom with us through the years. The man was a class act. He will be missed.

Mike Lovins
e-mail

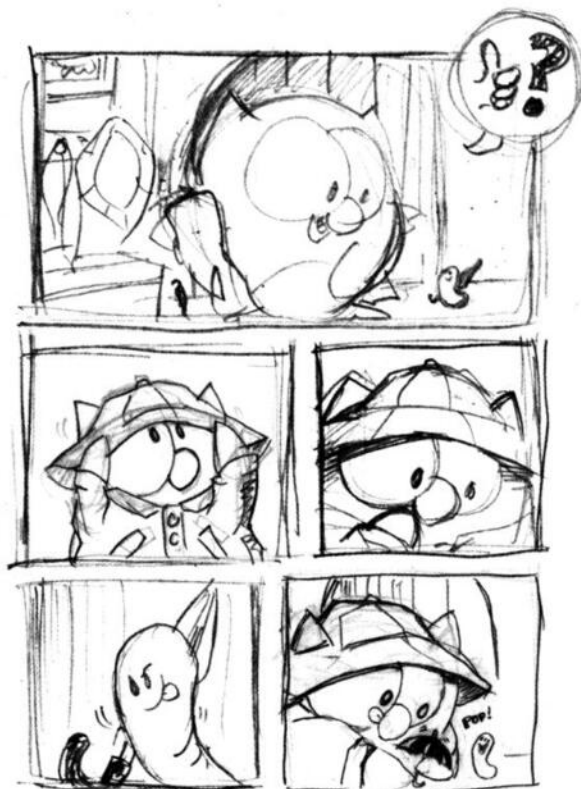
Three people in the room to hear Will Eisner speak? How disappointing.

("About Last Issue" continued from page 30)

Neil Gaiman

I was really sorry we lost the beginning of the interview here, where Neil was talking about his son, Mike, the computer scientist who is graduating from college, which, with Craig and John's kind indulgence, I'm including here:

The last awareness that I had of "Mikey" was that part of Neil's motivation in writing *Spawn* 9 was that he wanted to work on a comic book that was "cool" in nine-year-old Mikey's eyes—in that it was blood-spattered and had action figures attached to it. It seemed unlikely to me that we could be talking about the same "Mikey" until simple math told me that it was twelve years later on and that nine plus twelve do, indeed, equal twenty-one.

Below: Andy Runton sent tons of great Owly *material for his interview in* FC 5*—so much so that we didn't come close to having enough room for it. So we took literally his "thumbnails" and reproduced them about, well, thumbnail size. Our apologies to Andy. Here are a couple of samples large enough to see without a magnifying glass.*

Runton: "This is a page from *Owly: Just a Little Blue.* Owly sees that the rain has subsided, so he and Wormy go outside. Rob and Chris were confused as to why exactly the two friends were going outside. [For the revised version, above right,] I added a speech bubble where Owly tells wormy that 'the sun is coming out.' And then one that says, 'let's go outside, it'll make us happy.' That helped to clarify the situation and added to the interaction between Owly and his friend who, at this point in the story, were feeling pretty down."

Ye Bookes of Cerebus: the Comic Art of Dave Sim and Gerhard Artists' Reception and Gallery Talk – October 1, 2005

Report and Personal Reminiscence by Jason Trimmer, Curator of Exhibition/Prints and Drawings

The "*Ye Bookes of Cerebus: the Comic Art of Dave Sim and Gerhard*" exhibition opened on September 23, 2005 at the Quick Center for the Arts at St. Bonaventure University, and the following Saturday, we held an artists' reception and gallery talk that went very well. In that first week alone, over two hundred fifty people visited the *Cerebus* exhibition.

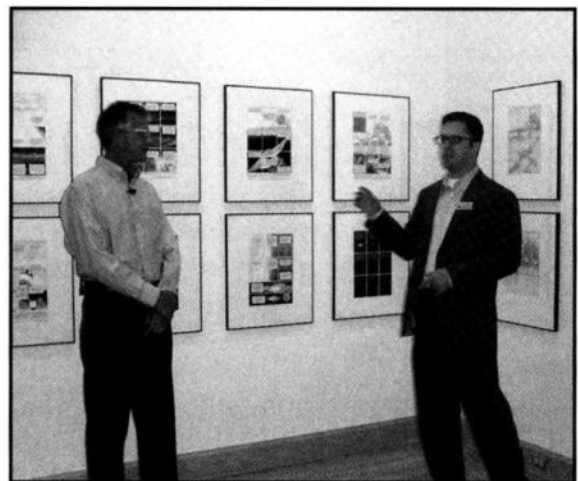
Prior to the Saturday reception, I picked Dave up in Niagara Falls, Ontario, which marked my first time seeing the spectacular Wonder of the World. We even had time to go on the Behind the Falls tour, and to go on the appropriately named Maid of the Mist boat trip. It was a fantastic time, and having Dave (who knows more than just a little about the history of the Falls) as my tour guide was great fun. On Friday, Dave was interviewed by a reporter from the student newspaper, the *Bona Venture*, and spent the rest of the afternoon touring our seven gallery spaces at the Quick Center. Friday evening after dinner, Dave and I stopped by the Best Western and met up with some members of the *Cerebus* Yahoo! Newsgroup and took them over to the Center for a sort-of "members only" preview tour of the exhibition. Since many of them had just arrived in town, it must have seemed like a whirlwind of activity. It was great to be able to give them the chance to really examine the pages and sketches on display and to hear their comments.

By noon on Saturday the 1st, visitors had started massing in preparation for the 1 p.m. gallery talk. Adding to the excitement was the presence of a film crew from Waterloo Films, who were on hand to gather some footage for a potential documentary on Dave, Ger, and the *Cerebus* project. There was definitely an electric atmosphere, and I was very happy to see so much of the Cerebus community come out in support of the show. We had over eighty people attend the talk, which is a great number, and four times as many people as we generally have in attendance for an artist's talk. Most of those in attendance came in from out of town—even from

as far away as Dallas, Texas (take a bow, Mr. Jeff Seiler! Representing!). We also had a contingent from Don's Atomic Comics in Buffalo make it down for the day.

The talk was divided into two parts: Dave and I talking about the religious themes that make up the majority of the pages on display (from *Rick's Story*, *Latter Days*, and *The Last Day*) and some general *Cerebus* background, then Gerhard and I went around the gallery with those in attendance while talking about his work on the series. I have to confess only being able to remember bits and pieces of it, since I was very much "in the moment" the whole time.

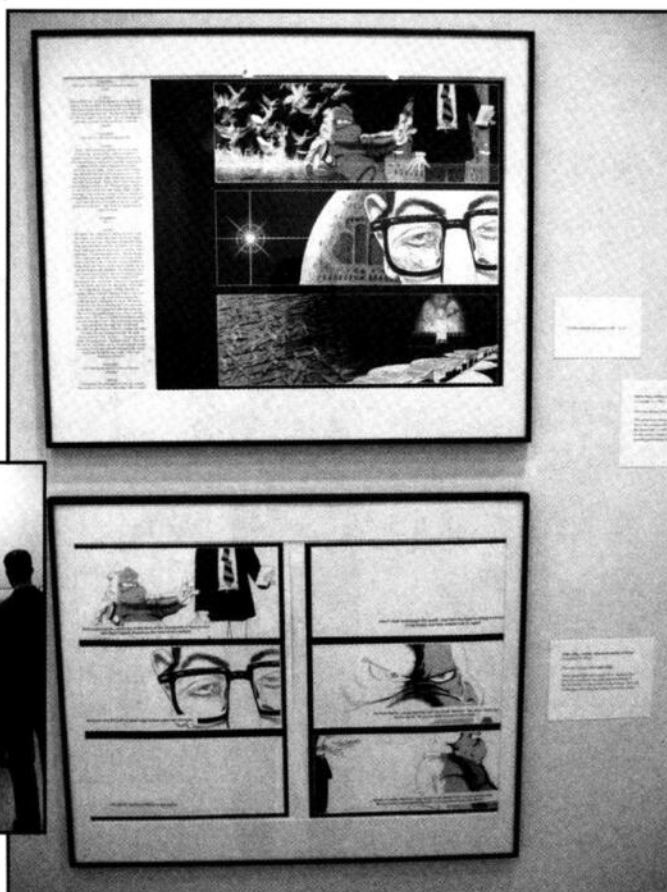
The talk with Dave centered on the importance of Scripture, both to Dave and in the final books of the series. I commented that, for myself, *Cerebus* had been the vehicle to expose me to more *actual* Scripture than I ever had read previously, and then gave the analogy of how one feeds a pill or a vitamin to a dog by first hiding it in peanut butter! That got a bit of a laugh from the crowd—as Dave said, "Cerebus is the peanut butter for your Scripture," and "more Scripture! Less peanut butter!" That is my overriding memory from that portion of the talk, for good or for ill.

Dave Sim, Gerhard, and Jason Trimmer

For the discussion with Gerhard, we focused on the process of his creation of those fantastically detailed backgrounds—there are a number of tracing paper preparatory sketches displayed in the exhibition on which Gerhard had worked out the scene and solved any visual problems before transferring the image to the page and inking it.

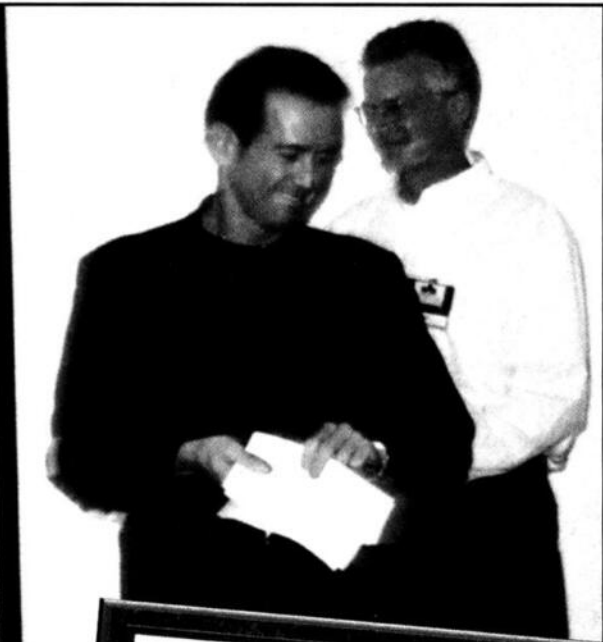
The inclusion of the sketches was very much a "happy accident" from my perspective, as I hadn't initially asked to borrow them for the show. However, when I picked up the pages from their studio, Dave and Ger showed me more about the process of producing a page, and Gerhard started flipping through his thick portfolio of sketches and asked very casually if I thought we could use them. After I picked my jaw up off the floor, I tried to (just as casually) say "sure." As it turns out, they have become a great "point of entry" for those visitors to the show that have never had any exposure to comic books or *Cerebus* before (which is the majority).

We had a number of University students that are currently enrolled in art classes at the talk, and it was great that they were able to get an idea of the time and effort that went into producing a page of *Cerebus*.

After the talk, Dave and Gerhard spent a couple of hours signing autographs and doing sketches, not just for *Cerebus* fans, but also for those who had never read an issue before. From my perspective, it was great to see the interest from that group and to hear their comments and awe at the work and level of craftsmanship that went into the series. And this continues: in the first month alone, over six hundred visitors have gone through the exhibition! "Ye Bookes of Cerebus: the Comic Art of Dave Sim and Gerhard" remains on view at the Quick Center for the Arts until January 29, 2006. For more information, visit http://www.sbu.edu/go/arts-center/index.htm, or e-mail Jason Trimmer at jtrimmer@sbu.edu.

Photos by Ruta Marino and Rose.

Another Thing Coming

NEWS & MORE

Below: Bill Sienkiewicz exits the stage having presented Ger and me with the Shuster Award for Outstanding Canadian Achievement. April 30, 2005. Photo by Dawn Peavy (Joe Shuster's niece). Below inset: a close-up of the award.

Above: Sim's splash page for "A Boy and His Aardvark" as it appeared in *Power Comics* 1 in 1977. Facing page: Sim and Gerhard's stunning re-creation of that splash, produced for this issue of *Following Cerebus!*

Back cover:

The Blue Jays were six outs away from sweeping the Orioles at Camden Yards when I had the sudden brainstorm of having my picture taken with my host, Diamond Comics Distributors owner Steve Geppi for the back cover of *Following Cerebus*. It worked like a charm. Two hitters later, Sammy Sosa belted a line shot inside the third base line, cashing in two runs and leading the Orioles to victory. Whew. Now there's a chance I'll be invited back. If you're ever watching an Orioles home game and wonder where Steve is, he's right behind the "H" where it says "Home of the Orioles" on top of the dugout. Unbelievably amazing seats for watching a ball game. Above left to right Mindy Geppi, Steve's wife; John K. Snyder, president of Diamond Galleries; Steve and Little Steve bag a few z's during the seventh inning stretch.

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